

NEW
ON
HER
YS
RARY
CTS

3 1761 00590878 5



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

C

H.D. TRAILL

Δ

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

THE NEW FICTION

AND OTHER ESSAYS

67n

THE NEW FICTION

AND OTHER

ESSAYS ON LITERARY SUBJECTS

BY

H. D. TRAILL

AUTHOR OF

'THE NEW LUCIAN,' 'THE LIFE OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN,'
ETC., ETC.

59687
221 / 6 / 03

LONDON :

HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET

1897

All rights reserved

CONTENTS.

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| THE NEW FICTION | 1 |
| THE POLITICAL NOVEL | 27 |
| THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE | 52 |
| MATTHEW ARNOLD | 76 |
| SAMUEL RICHARDSON | 104 |
| THE NOVEL OF MANNERS | 137 |
| NEWSPAPERS AND ENGLISH | 170 |
| LUCIAN | 196 |
| THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET | 226 |
| THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS | 249 |
| THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR | 283 |

THE NEW FICTION

NOT to be 'new' is, in these days, to be nothing, and in seeking as impartial and as uncommitting a title as possible for the work of the latest recruits to the army of successful novelists, I have not thought myself justified in withholding the indispensable certificate of novelty. They object, or at least the ablest and most popular of them has objected, it appears, to being described as a 'realist'; so I am no longer permitted to label his art as the 'New Realism.' But I am not at all sure that I shall be any more fortunate in my emendation. For it would not surprise me if the writer to whom I have referred were to protest against my describing his books even as 'fiction'; so insistent is he, I understand, on their literal and historical accuracy, so earnest is he in assuring us that every character whom he pourtrays has had a real existence, and every incident he relates, an actual occurrence, so artless, in short, is his confidence in a justification which has no sort of relevancy to the defence of a work of art. Still, in

THE NEW FICTION

the hope that he will pass the word 'fiction' as indicating the product of an inventor, and not insist upon some other description of it which shall denote the historian, I will let it stand at the head of this paper in order to avoid giving a controversial, or at any rate a controverted, title to the whole volume. But for convenience sake I shall still crave leave to discuss the narrative and descriptive method with which these pages deal under the name bestowed upon it by its more ardent admirers: that namely of the New Realism.

If that description is disclaimed by both, as it has been by one, of the two novelists whose novels I am about to consider, we can yet understand what it means in the mouths of those who use it. It would naturally come pat to their lips. Nothing, indeed, should surprise us less than that in a day when the spurious is everywhere supposed to be successfully disguised and sufficiently recommended to the public by merely being described as new, we should find our attention solicited by a New Realism, of which the two most obvious things to be said are that it is unreal with the falsity of the half truth, and as old as the habit of exaggeration. One of the latest professors of this doubtful form of art is the very young American writer, Mr. Stephen Crane, who first attracted notice in this country by a novel entitled *The Red Badge of Courage*. Whether this work was or

THE NEW FICTION

was not described by its admirers as an achievement in realism, I am not aware. As a matter of fact, and as the antecedents, and indeed the age, of the writer showed, it was not a record of actual observation. Mr. Crane had evidently been an industrious investigator and collator of the emotional experiences of soldiers, and had evolved from them a picture of the mental state of a recruit going into action. It was artistically done and obtained a not undeserved success; but no method, of course, could be less realistic in the sense on which the professors of the New Realism insist, than the process which resulted in this elaborate study of the emotions of the battlefield from the pen of a young man who has never himself smelt powder.

Since then, however, Mr. Crane has given us two small volumes, which are presumably realistic or nothing. If circumstances have prevented the author from writing about soldiers in action 'with his eye on the object,' there are no such obstacles to his studying the Bowery and 'Bowery boys' from the life. We may take it, therefore, that *Maggie* and *George's Mother* are the products of such study. According to Mr. Howells's effusive 'Appreciation,' which prefaces it, *Maggie* is a remarkable story, having 'that quality of fatal necessity which dominates Greek tragedy.' Let us see then what this Sophoclean work is like.

THE NEW FICTION

The story of *Maggie* opens with a fight between the boys of Rum Alley and those of Devil's Row. Jimmie, the heroine's brother, is a boy of Rum Alley, aged nine, and when the curtain draws up he is the centre of a circle of urchins who are pelting him with stones.

'Howls of wrath went up from them. On their small convulsed faces shone the grins of true assassins. As they charged, they threw stones and cursed in shrill chorus . . . Jimmie's coat had been torn to shreds in a scuffle, and his hat was gone. He had bruises on twenty parts of his body, and blood was dripping from a cut in his head. His wan features looked like those of a tiny insane demon . . . The little boys ran to and fro hurling stones and swearing in barbaric trebles . . . A stone had smashed in Jimmie's mouth. Blood was bubbling over his chin and down upon his ragged shirt. Tears made furrows on his dirt-stained cheeks. His thin legs had begun to tremble and turn weak, causing his small body to reel. His roaring curses of the first part of the fight had changed to a blasphemous chatter. In the yells of the whirling mob of Devil's Row children there were notes of joy like songs of triumphant savagery. The little boys seemed to leer gloatingly at the blood on the other child's face.'

A lad of sixteen, afterwards destined to play an important part in the story, then approaches. He smites one of the Devil's Row children on the back of the head, and the little boy falls to the ground and gives a tremendous howl. A reinforcement of the Rum Alley children then arrives, and there is a momentary pause in the fight, during which Jimmie becomes involved in a quarrel with Blue Billie, one of his own side.

THE NEW FICTION

‘They struck at each other, clinched, and rolled over on the cobble-stones.

“Smash ‘im, Jimmie, kick d’ face off ‘im,” yelled Pete, in tones of delight.

‘The small combatants pounded and kicked, scratched and tore. They began to weep, and their curses struggled in their throats with sobs. The other little boys clasped their hands and wriggled their legs in excitement. They formed a bobbing circle round the pair.’

At this juncture Jimmie’s father arrives on the scene, and endeavours to separate the combatants with a view of ‘belting’ his son. To this end he begins to kick into the chaotic mass on the ground. ‘The boy Billie felt a heavy boot strike his head. He made a furious effort and disentangled himself from Jimmie. He tottered away. Jimmie arose painfully from the ground and confronting his father began to curse him.’ His parent kicked him. ‘Come home, now,’ he cried, ‘an’ stop yer jawin’, or I’ll lam the everlasting head off yer.’ Upon this they go home, the boy swearing ‘luridly,’ for ‘he felt that it was a degradation for one who aimed to be some vague kind of a soldier or a man of blood, with a sort of sublime licence, to be taken home by a father.’

This is the first chapter much condensed. In the original there are eight pages of it. Is it art? If so, is the making of mud-pies an artistic occupation, and are the neglected brats who are to be found rolling in the gutters of every great city unconscious artists? In the next chapter Jimmie pummels his little sister

and his mother quarrels with and rates her husband till she drives him to the public-house, remaining at home to get drunk herself. In the third chapter, Jimmie, who has stopped out to avoid an outbreak of her intoxicated fury, steals home again late at night, listens outside the door to a fight going on within between his father and mother, and at last creeps in with his little sister to find both parents prostrate on the floor in a drunken stupor, and to huddle in a corner until daybreak, cowering with terror lest they should awaken. For when you are a 'realist's' little boy, you have to be very handy and adaptable, and do exactly what that realist requires of you: so that, though you may have been defying and cursing your father at one moment, like the daring little imp you have been described as being, you may at the next moment, and for the purpose of another sort of painful picture, have to behave like a cowed and broken-spirited child of a totally different type.

These opening scenes take up about one-fifth of the short book, and those that follow are like unto them. There is a little less fighting, but a good deal more drinking. Jimmie becomes a truck driver, and fights constantly with other drivers, but the fights are not described at length. His father dies, probably of drink, and his mother takes to drinking harder than ever. Maggie is seduced and deserted

by Pete, the youth who appeared on the scene during the opening fight and hit one of the infant fighters on the back of the head. Jimmie resents the proceedings of the Bowery Lovelace as a breach of good manners, and, going with a friend to the tavern where Pete acts as 'bar-tender,' the two set upon him, and there ensues a fight, in the course of which the lips of the combatants 'curl back and stretch tightly over the gums in ghoul-like grins.' It lasts for four pages, and is brought to a close by the intervention of the police, and the escape of Jimmie 'with his face drenched in blood.' How this story continues, how Maggie falls lower and lower and finally dies, and how after her death her gin-sodden mother is passionately entreated to forgive her, and at last graciously consents to do so—all this may be read in Mr. Crane's pages, and shall not here be summarised from them. Is it necessary to do so? Or to give a *précis* of the companion volume, *George's Mother*, the story of a 'little old woman' actually of sober and industrious habits, and of her actually not vicious though weak son, of whose back-slidings she dies? Need I give specimen extracts from it? I hope not—I think not. The extracts which have been already given are perfectly fair samples of Mr. Crane's work. I can honestly affirm that anyone who is willing to accept my assurance that to read these two books through would be to wade

THE NEW FICTION

through some three hundred and thirty pages of substantially the same stuff as the above extracts, will do Mr. Crane no injustice. So I will pass from him to a novelist of considerably larger calibre.

For Mr. Arthur Morrison, author of *Tales of Mean Streets* and *A Child of the Jago*, undoubtedly carries heavier guns than Mr. Crane. To begin with, he can tell a story, while Mr. Crane can only string together a series of loosely cohering incidents. Many of his characters are vividly and vigorously drawn, while the American writer puts us off for the most part with sketches and shadowy outlines. Mr. Morrison's ruffians and their ruffianism are better discriminated, and though there is plenty of fighting and drinking and general brutality in his last and strongest work—one of the faction fights in which, indeed, is related at quite inordinate length—he understands that the description of these things alone will not suffice to make a satisfactory story even about blackguards. He has outgrown that touching *naïveté* displayed in the younger writer's obvious belief in the perpetual freshness and charm of mere squalor. He perceives that merely to follow his characters, as Mr. Crane does his, from the drinking-bar to the low music-hall and thence home again, day after day, with interludes of brawling and 'bashing,' and other like recreations, becomes, after a hundred pages or so, a little monotonous, and that the life of the

THE NEW FICTION

criminal in his constant struggle with the law, and in perpetual danger from its officers, possesses at least the element of 'sport,' and presents features of variety and interest which that of the mere sot and tavern-brawler cannot possibly offer. Above all, Mr. Morrison wields a certain command of pathos, a power in which Mr. Crane is not only deficient, but of which he does not even appear to know the meaning; and were it not for a certain strange and, in truth, paradoxical defect, of which more hereafter, in his method of employing it, he would at times be capable of moving his readers very powerfully indeed. In a word, the English writer differs from the American by all the difference which divides the trained craftsman from the crude amateur, and he deserves to that extent more serious and detailed criticism.

What, however, has most astonished one of Mr. Morrison's critics fresh from a perusal of *A Child of the Jago*, is the impression of extraordinary unreality which, taken as a whole, it leaves behind it. To a critic opposed to the theories and methods of so-called realism, this is naturally rather disconcerting. He has probably been girding up his critical loins for the task of showing that the realist has lost sight of art in the perusal and capture of naked Truth, when lo! he finds that even Truth herself appears to have altogether escaped her pursuer. He was preparing himself to detect and expose the æsthetic and artistic

defects of a supposed product of literary photography, when to his amazement he discovers that the photograph, though it seems distinct enough to the gaze which concentrates itself successively on the various parts of the picture, yet fades, when the attempt is made to view it in its entirety, into a mere blur. He comes out from the Jago with the feelings, not, as he had expected, of a man who has just paid a visit to the actual district under the protection of the police, but of one who has just awakened from the dream of a prolonged sojourn in some fairyland of horror. This, to be sure, may be the effect which Mr. Morrison desired to produce: it is certainly not difficult, I think, to show that his methods are distinctly calculated to produce it; but then those methods cannot be exactly the methods which the realist professes to employ, nor that effect the effect at which he is commonly supposed to aim.

What is the Jago? The Jago is a name of Mr. Morrison's own invention, and applied by him to a district which he carefully localises by giving it two real East-End thoroughfares, High Street, Shoreditch, and Bethnal Green Road, as boundaries on two of its sides. He estimates its area as that of 'a square of two hundred and fifty yards or less,' and describes its population as 'swarming in thousands.' Yet with the exception of the hero's mother, and a single family besides, it appears to contain no one adult person

among all these thousands who is not actually or potentially either a thief, or a prostitute, or a 'fence,' or a professional mendicant, or the female decoy of drunken libertines for the purpose of robbery with murderous violence. In the opening chapter of the book, the wife of Billy Leary brings in a victim to the 'cosh,'—an iron rod with a knob at the end, which the craftsman carried in his coat-sleeve, 'waiting about dark staircase corners till his wife (married or not) brought in a well-drunken stranger, when with a sudden blow behind the head the stranger was happily coshed, and whatever was found on him as he lay insensible was the profit of the transaction.' And we are told that 'there were legends of surprising ingatherings achieved by wives of especial diligence: one of a woman who had brought to the cosh some six-and-twenty on a night of public rejoicing.' Mrs. Leary's stranger was 'happily coshed,' and afterwards thrown out into the street. As thus:—

'In a little while something large and dark was pushed forth from the door opening near Jago Row, which Billy Leary's spouse had entered. The thing rolled over and lay tumbled on the pavement for a time unmoved. It might have been yet another would-be sleeper, but for its stillness. Just such a thing it seemed belike to two that lifted their heads and peered from a few yards off till they rose on hands and knees and crept to where it lay: Jago rats both. A man it was, with a thick smear across his face and about his head, the source of the dark trickle that sought the gutter dreamily over the broken flags. The drab stuff of his pockets peeped out here and there in a crumpled bunch, and his

THE NEW FICTION

waistcoat gaped where the watch-guard had been. Clearly here was an uncommonly remunerative cosh—a cosh so good that the boots had been neglected and remained on the man's feet. These the kneeling two unlaced deftly, and rising, prize in hand, vanished in the deeper shadow of Jago Row.'

This, be it observed, is not a crime of rare occurrence, and the work of a limited class of criminals. You are invited to believe that it is a regular industry of the Jago practised *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*, throughout the whole district, at all times, and by every one who has the means of practising it with success. Lack of such means is the only limit to it. 'S'elp me!' says one of the characters, referring to Mrs. Leary, 'I'd carry the cosh meself if I'd a woman like 'er.'

After this one ought not, perhaps, to be surprised at the fight between the Ranns and the Learys, related with all the circumstantiality of the scrimmage between Molly Seagrim and her enemies in the churchyard, though in a grim, smileless fashion, contrasting comically enough with Fielding's most humorous burlesque of a Homeric battlepiece. But it lasts for twenty mortal pages, until indeed we get a little tired of the prowess of Sally Green in biting her female adversaries, and tearing out their hair, and are almost glad when Nora Walsh brings the fight to a close by breaking a bottle on the kerb, and stabbing Sally about the face with the jagged points. The two clans subsequently fraternize, and,

at a later stage of this agreeable romance, one faction invites the other to a 'sing-song' at Mother Gapps's, when the floor unfortunately falls in, and the guests, suspecting a *piège*, attack their hosts with exceeding savagery in the cellar. When the burglar-father of little Dicky Perrott, the hero of the book, is not 'burgling,' an occupation which, by affording him facilities for the murder of a treacherous fence, conducts him ultimately to the gallows, the reader is entertained principally with fights; but the story of Dicky himself is interesting, though with odd touches of old-fashioned melodrama about it, and would be much more so if not buried as it is beneath the mass of squalid irrelevances which encumbers the book.

No wonder that many who know the East-End of London well have protested against this picture.¹ The houses in that area of 'two hundred and fifty yards square' have been cleared of its former occupants and their dens, and the original of the Jago has, it is admitted, ceased to exist. But I will make bold to say that as described by Mr. Morrison—described, that is to say as a place of which, with the half-dozen exceptions above mentioned, every single inhabitant out of 'swarming thousands' is either a thief, or a harlot, or a 'cosher' or a decoy, or a 'fence,' or a professional mendicant—it never did and never could exist. Mr. Morrison has simply taken all the vari-

¹ See note at end of this essay.

ous types of London misery, foulness, and rascality and 'dumped them down' on the area aforesaid. He has taken the brutal pugnacity of one of the courts of an Irish quarter, mixed it with the knavery of a thieves' kitchen in some other district, made 'the gruel thick and slab' in his infernal cauldron with a highly concentrated dose of the foul scum which is found floating, though in a much diluted form, on the surface of the vast sea of poverty in all great cities; and, pouring the precious compost into a comparatively small vessel, he invites the world to inspect it as a sort of essence or extract of metropolitan degradation. If it is not what you would have actually found in exploring the Jago, it is no doubt what you might have found if all London had happened to pour its manifold streams of corruption into that particular *sentina*. I have nothing to say for the moment against art of this kind, except that it is certainly not realism. It is the idealising method, and its result is as essentially ideal as the Venus of Milo. That it is the idealisation of ugliness, instead of beauty, is a mere detail.

So much for the book as a whole. As an imaginative picture of life at the East-End—that is to say as a picture formed out of a multitude of sordid and shocking actualities, many or most of them dissociated from each other in real life, but here imaginatively combined for the purpose of a work of

THE NEW FICTION

fiction—it may pass; but, unless words are to part with all their distinctions of meaning, it can no more be a [realistic history of any community of human beings that ever existed on the earth, than is the *Voyage to the Houyhnhnms*.

Nevertheless, though the total effect of the story is unreal and phantasmagoric, yet, considered as a series of distinct scenes, or as a gallery of repulsive portraits, may it not, it may be asked, be a triumph of accurate description and life-like portraiture? Grant that the collocation of so many hideous figures and the concatenation of such an uninterrupted succession of revolting incidents, is misdescribed as 'realism,' yet the drawing of those figures and the narratives of those incidents may be masterpieces of realistic art. Well, is that so? As for the incidents, no doubt you are made to 'see them' plainly enough; but, speaking for myself personally, I see them not a whit more plainly for the crudities of the description. There is a fight, half prize-fight, half quarrel-fight, in *A Child of the Jago*, a sort of incident which interests if not delights all of us, and probably will continue to do so until the human race is ready for elevation to some loftier, but less lively, plane of being. It is most conscientiously described—with all the conscientiousness indeed of the gentleman mentioned by Sheridan, who described the Phoenix 'like a poultcher,' not 'letting us off a single feather.' Every

THE NEW FICTION

punch with its effect on the punched part is faithfully delineated in black and blue, picked out with crimson; but the blood and bruises with which Mr. Morrison so lavishly adorns his pages do not make us realise the battle one whit more vividly than, for instance, we realise the prize-fight in *Rodney Stone*, an incident nevertheless in which Mr. Conan Doyle cannot be accused of shirking any necessary detail. And so with the faction fight, and the scrimmage after the 'sing-song,' and the murder which brings the plot to its climax. They are vigorous pieces of description, but any intelligent reader who compares them with other examples, by writers of other schools, will find that their vigour is not really enhanced by the violences of colouring, and that their reality does not in the least depend upon their so-called realism.

As to the character-drawing, I willingly admit its occasionally high merit. Josh Perrott, the burglar father of Dicky, is a convincing portrait, and strikes one as consistent and unexaggerated. The man has the virtues, or rather, the one virtue, which goes with the vices of the lowest type of Englishman—that dogged stoicism in the face of death, which is the nobler, as the brute ferocity is the baser, side of his bulldog nature. But what is one to say of Aaron Weech, of Father Sturt—nay, of Dicky Perrott himself? Have the transactions of Weech with Dicky, and the relations of Dicky to Weech, been actually

THE NEW FICTION

studied from East-End criminal life, or are they not rather exercises in the more stagy and artificial manner of the despised sentimentalist Dickens? And, if so, what a falling off is here for the New Realism! To observe that Aaron Weech is simply a revival of our old friend Mr. Fagin is a too obvious criticism, and is a not sufficiently serious objection—for ‘comic relief’ is needed sorely enough in Mr. Morrison’s pages, Heaven knows, and to borrow it from Dickens is at least, in a phrase of that humourist’s own, to ‘go to the right shop’ for it. But it is a little too much to make an amalgam of Artful Dodger and Oliver Twist, which really is what Mr. Morrison has done with Dicky Perrott. For what else can be said of a boy who is precocious enough to steal a nickel clock from a neighbour’s mantelpiece, yet green enough to allow a fence to have it in liquidation of a debt of two-pence? The child-thief is not quite so common, I hope, even in a thieves’ quarter, as we should gather from Mr. Morrison’s writings; but there can be very few East-End children, honest or dishonest, who do not know more about the price of articles than that. They acquire that knowledge in only too hard a school, and begin at only too tender an age. The theft, again, of the cheap toy musical-box by way of remorseful compensation of the robbed Ropers with ‘a thing worth any fifty clocks,’ in Dicky’s estimation—surely that is not realistically imagined;

THE NEW FICTION

surely that is not a natural touch of childish character in a child of the Jago. It is only the well-nurtured and well-cared-for child who sees no reason why 'grown-ups' should not value toys, as he does himself, more highly than articles of domestic use. A child of the Jago would have known very well that if his mother were bound for the pawnbroker's she would be more likely to take a flat-iron with her than a tin soldier. But that Dicky's character should abound with these incongruous sentimental touches is not surprising ; for Sentimentalism is in truth the Nemesis that dogs the New Realism and its professors. In their pose of cynical self-repression, in their determination to make their realism 'unflinching,' 'relentless,' 'terrible,' and all the rest of it, they so sternly shut their eyes to the real pathos of the scenes and lives which they describe, that at last they seem to lose the power of discriminating between the real article and its counterfeits, and, when they need the pathetic for the purposes of a foil, they are compelled to fall back upon shams of their own invention.

Even when they quit the hideous and revolting for the merely dreary and depressing, the same note of exaggeration almost everywhere asserts itself. In *Tales of Mean Streets*, Mr. Morrison has strung together fifteen short stories, some of them repulsive, after the fashion of his long story above discussed,

others simply gloomy and miserable. Dealing, as he does, only with two or three characters, in most of these stories his realism produces a less unreal impression—for, of course, the obvious reason that it is easier to believe in the existence of one or two brutes and savages than of a whole London district, peopled by such inhabitants ‘in swarming thousands,’ and by no one else. I need not, however, discuss either the hideous or the merely dreary stories in this volume. Not the former, because it would be going over the ground already traversed; and not the latter, because Mr. Morrison has so admirably defined his own standpoint with regard to them in the Introduction that it will simply suffice me to examine that.

In this Introduction Mr. Morrison describes, and powerfully describes, a mean East-End street, and the lives of its inhabitants. It is not a thieves’ street like any of the courts and alleys of the Jago; it is the abode of fairly respectable working-men, with habits of regular industry. Indeed, it is this regularity, with the deadly tedium created by it, which Mr. Morrison mainly relies on for his effect. He tells us how the inhabitants of this street are knocked up every morning at half-past five by the policeman or the night watchman, and rise and go to their day’s labour at the docks, the gas-works, and the shipyards; how a little later comes the ‘trotting of sorrow-laden little feet along the grim street to the

grim Board School, three grim streets off ; then ‘silence, save for a subdued sound of scrubbing here and there, and the puny squall of croupy infants’ ; then, still later on, ‘a new trotting of little feet to docks, gas-works, and ship-yards with father’s dinner in a basin and a red handkerchief,’ and so to the board-school again ; then ‘more muffled scrubbing and more squalling’ ; the return of the children from school, the return of sooty artisans from work ; a ‘smell of bloater up and down’ ; nightfall ; the fighting of boys in the street, perhaps of men at the corner near the beershop ; sleep.

And this is the record of a day in this street ; and every day is hopelessly the same except Sunday, when, however, ‘one monotony’ is only ‘broken by another.’ And the day is only symbolical of the life, which has its dawn of birth, its school-time, ‘its mid-day play-hour, when love peeps even into this street’ ; then more trotting of little feet, this time new and strange little feet ; the scrubbing and squalling, the end of the sooty day’s work, the last home-coming, nightfall, sleep. Where in the East-End, asks Mr. Morrison in conclusion, lies this street ? And he answers, ‘Everywhere.’

‘The hundred and fifty yards is only a link in a long and a mightily tangled chain—is only a turn in a tortuous maze. This street of the square holes is hundreds of miles long. That it is planned in short lengths is true, but there is no other way in the

THE NEW FICTION

world that can more properly be called a single street because of its dismal lack of accent, its sordid uniformity, its utter remoteness from delight.'

Yes, it is a picture of infinite melancholy, but whence does its melancholy arise? From the meanness of the mean street and the exceptionally dull and narrow lives of its inhabitants? That the author intends to convey that impression is obvious; but the impression is nine-tenths of it false. Why, if I had Mr. Morrison's fine descriptive gift, I would select a street quite other than mean, a street consisting, not of poverty-stricken little houses, but of 'eligible' suburban villas, a street inhabited, not by hard-pressed artisans, but by comfortable, even by 'warm' City men; and I would undertake to describe it and the daily lives of its inhabitants—the daily journey of the men to their business; the daily resumption by the women of their burden of household duties and household worries; their Sundays; the growth and departures of their children; their old age; their death—I say that had I the pen of Mr. Morrison I would undertake so to describe these things, that the heart of the reader should sink and shrink within him at the thought of man's lot upon earth, and, perhaps, burn with anger at the spiritless patience in which man endures it, with the 'quietus' of the 'bare bodkin' always within his reach. The power of suggesting these emotions is not a property

THE NEW FICTION

of mean streets; it is a property of all streets, a property of life itself, with its unresting but aimless flow. If Mr. Morrison has not yet felt that himself, he will feel it before he passes middle life, and he will know then, if he does not already know, the true composition of the bitter draught that he has here brewed and presented to us. He will admit that he has been trying to pass off upon us a mixture of *Weltschmerz* and *tedium vitae* as genuine 'Essence of Mean Street.'

Measured out in minim glasses and copiously diluted, it is not an unpleasant potion, though it is enervating if too often indulged in, and positively deadly in large doses; but always, and in any case, it is a subjective product, a way of looking at things, not a quality of things seen. The people who thus depress you with the intense monotony of their lives, do not, except by moments, feel it themselves any more than, except by moments, you feel the monotony of your own. Writers who bear this in mind are safeguarded from exaggeration; but Mr. Morrison is not of them. For see how he proceeds with the account of the mean street. 'Nobody laughs here,' says he, 'life is too serious a thing! Nobody sings.' Is that true of any street in London or elsewhere? nay, is it true of any assemblage of human beings, numbering children among them? Again, 'Nobody from this street goes to the theatre. That would mean too long a journey,

and would cost money, which might buy bread and cheese and boots?' Indeed? It is from the daughters of these families that domestic service (when they will condescend to it) is largely recruited further west. If Mr. Morrison will ask the next housemaid he meets if she ever went to the theatre, I can promise him that *elle lui dira des nouvelles*. True, they ought not to be *nouvelles* to one who professes to have made a special study of the working class: though when he adds that for those workmen 'who wear black Sunday suits' theatre-going 'would be sinful,' it is difficult not to suspect him of a confusion between this class and the *petite bourgeoisie*. And what in the name of all the maid-servants in London are we to make of this? 'Now and again a penny novel has been found among the private treasures of a growing daughter, and been wrathfully confiscated.' Do the grown-up daughters then only begin to acquire their taste for this class of literature, and to collect their ample libraries of it, *after* accepting their situations? If so, the growth, both of the taste and the library, is astonishingly rapid:

But if this is how the New Realism deals with the merely pathetic side of humble life; if these are its caricatures of the truth, where the truth is matter of pretty general knowledge, how are we to trust its dealings with those hideous and revolting aspects of the truth, which are matters of special inquiry and

THE NEW FICTION

expert information? We hardly need the counter testimony of experts to feel assured that, in the latter case also, the picture, as a whole, is overdrawn. It is not only that the note of exaggeration runs through its details, but that when they are substantially true they have been so selected as to render the total impression false: For the impulse to that selection has not been artistically sincere. A public avid of sensation and critics wanting in the sense of measure have corrupted it, until the desire of each writer to strike and shock more violently than his competitors, to be more 'relentless' and 'unflinching,' to write a 'stronger,' even if only in the sense of a more pungently malodorous, book than they, has first driven them to load their literary palettes with only 'lurid' colours, and is now rapidly demoralising, if, with some of them, it has not already demoralised their artistic sense to the extent of blinding it to all other hues. That this fate should befall its appropriate victims is hardly, perhaps, a matter worth any sensible man's regret; but Mr. Morrison does not belong by nature to this class of writers. He has given proof of the power of better things.

NOTE.

I am unwilling to encumber these pages with controversial matter, but Mr. Morrison has so strenuously challenged this statement on page 13, and so confidently defied me to produce any evidence of the protest to which I referred, that

THE NEW FICTION

I think I owe it to the dissentients themselves to place on record their rebuttals of Mr. Morrison's main propositions.

Mr. Woodland Erlebach, formerly a manager of the Nichol Street Board School, who speaks from a thirty years' acquaintance with the district, (Mr. Morrison's Jago,) and who throughout that period has visited it for at least forty Sunday and thirty Wednesday nights as well as on many other occasions in each year, addressed a letter on the subject of this novel to the editor of a literary journal from which I take the following extract :

‘Mr. Morrison, according to his own statement, (published in the *Daily News*, December 12th, 1896,) only became acquainted with the Nichol Street district at the time when the London County Council were about to clear it of houses—say 1890 or '91—and Rev. O. Jay, who introduced him to it, only began work there in 1886. Therefore those—and they are many—who, like myself, have known and worked in this neighbourhood for over thirty years may claim to know at least as much about its inhabitants and condition as these more recent explorers. And I boldly say that the district, though bad enough, was not even thirty years ago so hopelessly bad and vile as this book paints it. The characters pourtrayed may have had their originals, but they were the exception, and not the rule. Many poor, but honest and hard-working people have lived in these mean streets, and I can introduce you to several respectable men holding responsible positions whose early days were passed there, and who found their way out of the Jago that is represented as impossible to the hero (or rather victim) of this book.’

I have also seen letters of protest from the following workers in the district :

Mr. Henry Spicer, 14, Aberdeen Park, Highbury, at one

THE NEW FICTION

time fellow manager with Mr. Erlebach of the Nichol Street Board School, member of the third London School Board, and formerly M.P. for South Islington.

Mr. J. T. Henderson, 22, Aberdeen Park, Highbury, Secretary of the Nichol Street Ragged Schools, who has been constantly visiting the neighbourhood for over thirty years.

Mr. J. F. Barnard, 36, Hamilton Road, Highbury, who has been manager of the Nichol Street Penny Bank from 1874 to the present day, and has regularly during that time carried his bag of money to and fro through the very heart of this desperate district.

Mr. William Anderson, 22, Amherst Road, Hackney, Poor Law guardian of St. Leonard's, Shoreditch, who was born in Old Nichol Street, and lived there twenty years.

Mr. W. Weekes, 17, Fuller Street, Bethnal Green, a resident in New Nichol Street for over fifty years—indeed, until its destruction.

Mr. R. Allinson, of 96, Albert Road, Dalston, who has been for fourteen years specially detailed to the district by the London City Mission.

Miss Matthewman and Miss Newman, 99, Grosvenor Road, Canonbury, who for over thirty years have conducted a mothers' meeting among women, mostly from the Nichol Street district.

I am further informed that the Jago actually contained within its borders a large silk manufactory, the valuable wares of which, to say nothing of its honest working people, must have run grave risk in passing periodically through this colony of brigands. But I am not concerned to carry the dispute any further on my own account. The above, I think, is a sufficient response to Mr. Morrison's appeal to me to 'trot out my experts.'

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

CRITICS of authority assure us, and we all repeat after them, that the nineteenth century has found its most distinctive and characteristic medium of expression in the novel. Politicians tell us—therein perhaps a little magnifying their office, but still with substantial truth—that, next to Sport, the subject which enlists the greatest interest of the greatest number of Englishmen is that of Politics. Yet of all forms of nineteenth century fiction, the political novel is the most rarely attempted, and very much the most rarely attempted with success. It would almost seem as if this peculiar literary *genre*—popular and attractive to the literary artist as, for the reasons above set forth, we should have supposed it to be—had perished with its inventor. More than fifty years have passed since the young Benjamin Disraeli startled, half scandalized, and wholly delighted his then contemporary world of letters and politics with the first

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

of three novels, which a quarter of century later he described as 'forming a real trilogy,' having for their motive the exhibition of (1), 'the origin and character of our political parties;' (2), 'their influence on the moral and physical condition of the people;' and (3), 'the means by which that condition could be elevated and improved.' The first member of this trilogy was *Coningsby*; the second, *Sybil*; the third, *Tancred*. All three, but the first two in particular, were brilliantly successful with at any rate the educated and informed public of their time; they were recognised, consciously or unconsciously, as new and happy experiments; they are admired, quoted, and even read to this day. Yet, though half a century has elapsed since their appearance, they still occupy a place by themselves in literature. They are not only the first in their class, but they are almost alone in it. *Nec viget quicquam simile aut secundum.* Even the claimants for a place in that class during the fifty years' interval may be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Of course, no formidable rival of Disraeli was to be reasonably expected. The peculiar combination of gifts and advantages to which his extraordinary success was due will possibly never repeat itself; assuredly it is not likely to recur except at cometary intervals. We may get again—perhaps unknown to ourselves we have already had again among us—that

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

happy compound of youth, wit, audacity, and impertinence which gives to his political novels their complex charm. But we can no more restore the political and social conditions under which he wrote than we could re-create his personality, and surround it with the peculiar environment amid which it developed. One of the wholly irreproducible conditions of the Thirties and Forties was that political, like fashionable, 'society,'—and indeed the two terms were to a large extent convertible,—was a numerically small body, with characteristics, like those of all exclusive coteries, proportionately well marked: and that Disraeli had, for him, the great good fortune of *not* having been born into that society, and yet obtaining such early opportunities of observing it from within—if from only just within—its portals, as to enable his quick satiric observation to master its types, its language, and its ideas by the time, or more probably much before the time, when his brilliantly effective literary faculty had fully matured. His own account of those experiences, given with that mixture of pomp and *naïveté* which has so delightful a relish when you have once acquired the taste for it, is to be found in a well known paper in the Introduction to the 'Hughenden' edition of his novels, published in 1870. 'Born in a library,' he wrote, 'and trained from early childhood by learned men who did not share the passions and prejudices of our political and

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

social life, I had imbibed on some subjects conclusions different from those which generally prevail, and especially with reference to the history of our own country.' This, if I may be allowed to quote certain previously published remarks of my own on the same subject, 'was no common advantage in a day when strait was the gate and narrow the way that led through public school and university to political distinction, but when those who took that route found that the walls which on either hand protected them from competitors proportionately obstructed their view of the world in which they lived. It was from the heart of this outer world that the young Disraeli made a way for himself into the sacred avenue by dint of an inborn power which would not be denied recognition, and a native audacity which did not know the meaning of rebuff. Once there, he was able to survey the scene of petty strife and ignoble ambition around him with a critical detachment which was impossible to his rivals, and with "larger, other eyes" than theirs.'

These advantages, however, of origin and training and exceptional mode of entrance into public life, were not the only valuable superadditions to the 'daemonic' element in Disraeli's nature. There was another of hardly less importance and of his own acquisition. For if, from 1837, the date of his first return to Parliament, to 1844, when he published

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

Coningsby, he had studied politics 'from the inside,' he had also during the same period taken every opportunity of mixing with that world of fashion which plays at politics and fancies itself serious: he had indulged his satirical appetite to the full upon the fussy and impotent intrigues of great ladies, the agitations of hungry office-seekers, the manœuvres of cynical wirepullers, the disappointments of pompous grandes. After a few years of this experience he must have been fully equipped, even on the lighter and more trivial side of his art, for immediate success. Had he been without a political idea in his head, he would have been thoroughly qualified to produce what is now-a-days our almost only substitute for the political novel—that is to say, a *roman à clef*, in which prominent public men are episodically sketched under more or less easily penetrable disguises. But having, in fact, a head as full of political ideas as it could hold, it only needed that he should interweave satirical sketch with political speculation, and 'mount' the composite fabric on a background of orthodox love romance, in order to produce the inimitable Disraelian political novel that has become a permanent addition to the literature of English fiction.

So remarkable a concourse of rare conditions was, of course, most unlikely to repeat itself. Fortune might be prodigal in her production of brilliant

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

young men, of potential Disraelis, yet never again place any one of them in the peculiar position of the author of *Coningsby* and *Sybil*. Let us admit, too, in justice to our brilliant young men and women, that history, for all its alleged trick of repeating itself, shows no disposition to 'reconstitute the facts.' Let us admit that the material with which the contemporary political novelist would have to deal is less attractive, less readily lends itself to the novelist's use, than the material of the early Victorian days. Not that it is less fertile in occasions for the satirist; that, Heaven knows, is far from being the case. There is still a world of fashion which plays with politics and fancies itself serious; fussy and impotent intrigue is not unknown among ladies 'great,' or so fancying themselves; and if the wire-puller conducts his manœuvres a little more decently than of old, and the disappointed grandee conceals his wounds with more Spartan fortitude, it must be admitted that the minor office-seeker has never displayed his hopes and fears with a more artless indecency at every change of Government than he does to-day. All these types still exist, and the part which they play in the inner history of politics is still, no doubt, considerably greater than the innocent provincial delegate to 'Federations here,' and 'Federations there,' for a moment suspects. But it is from the very lack of that suspicion that a follower

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

of Disraeli in these days would suffer. If the contemporary public believe, as the vast majority of them do, that the political types and individuals of the Disraelian era have been swept into the background by the stately advancing march of Democracy, that the Lady Firebraces and St. Julians, the Tadpoles and Tapers of our own time, have ceased to count, it would be idle for a political novelist of to-day to give them prominent places in his work. He must treat them, if he introduces them at all, as secondary figures, almost perhaps as eccentric survivals from a past age, and must seek models for his principal characters among the new types of politician to whom the democratic period has given birth. And it must be obvious—even to themselves, I should think—that these worthy persons yield infinitely less artistic material than the unworthy persons whom they have, in the popular eye, at any rate, displaced. The New Politician may be respectable, but he is not picturesque. He may have—he has—an ample supply of foibles ready to the student's hand, but they are of the kind that depress rather than amuse.

Not that the essayers of the political novel who have appeared in the course of the intervening half-century have been much more fortunate in their era. The most notable among them was undoubtedly Mr. Anthony Trollope; but *Phineas Finn* is a truly disas-

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

trous attempt. As one looks back upon the period of that novel, and recalls the class of politicians who at that time filled the stage, and among whom the 'jaunty Viscount' was a mere picturesque survival, one feels it only just to admit that Mr. Trollope was not fortunate in the particular political life which he had undertaken to depict, or in the models from which he drew. Still the time of the second Reform movement was distinctly a stirring time. Its dramatic quality was keenly felt by those who were of sufficiently mature age to be interested in politics without having yet become acutely critical of politicians; and one might have thought that a practised story-teller would have succeeded in getting some of the stir and passion of the time into his pages. But Mr. Trollope, though a practised and indeed a highly popular story-teller, was not one of that kind. He was so little of a politician that he seems not even to have felt the excitement of a struggle which agitated many in those days who paid scant attention to the ordinary political controversies of the period. *Phineas Finn*, though published in 1869, but two years after the 'shooting of Niagara,' shows no traces of anything of the kind. There is not even Wordsworth's doubtful basis of the poetic, 'Emotion recollected in Tranquillity'; while, on the other hand, the author's perfect frigidity of temper has not added to the penetration of his glance. The hero, otherwise a

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

poor creature enough, is interesting as a 'document' —a specimen of the Irish member of the pre-Parnellite day; but the political magnates of the novel, from Mr. Mildmay downwards, are painfully wooden, and its whole political 'business' is quite pathetically dull.

By far the most serious attempt at a political novel which has been adventured since Disraeli's time, is that which has just been made by the accomplished author of *Robert Elsmere*. Perhaps the word 'serious' may not seem a very apt adjective to apply to the spirited enterprise which has borne fruit in *Sir George Tressady*; but the truth is that it is only too appropriate. *Sir George Tressady* is a serious—a very serious—effort in a department of fiction in which to be too serious—or, at any rate, to be nothing besides serious—is inevitably to miss complete success; and the first and most potent cause of Mrs. Ward's comparative failure as a political novelist is to be found in her lack of humour. She takes all her characters—her hero and heroine, (above all, her heroine,) her Ministers, her Opposition leaders, her Parliamentary orators, her 'labour members,'—as seriously as she has always (quite justifiably) taken herself and her art; and the result, to those of her readers who have had a near vision of the politics, and seen most of the leading political actors off the stage, is to give an idealized air to scenes and por-

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

traits which are nothing if not realistic, and which were obviously meant for examples of the most conscientious realism. The disappointment is all the greater because Mrs. Ward undoubtedly describes and recounts as one who knows. She has herself, doubtless, had some such near view of politics, and sight of the leading political actor with his 'paint and spangles off,' as might have enabled many a writer of less ability to add those satiric touches to their portraits which would have made them human. Quite possibly she may know as well as her critics where these touches should have come in ; she is quite observer enough to know ; but if so, it is to be supposed that she could not find it in her heart to put them in. Such is the deadly earnestness of her 'views,' that she *must* find mouthpieces for them—and, of course, for the opposite views too—who will do them justice ; and if appropriate spokesmen and spokeswomen are not to be found in characters realistically sketched from life, so much the worse for life and realism. The characters must be idealized, that is all : and idealized they have been with a vengeance in *Sir George Tressady*.

It may be pleaded, perhaps, that the date of the novel is avowedly fixed some indefinite number of years ahead of us. '*Temp. Victoria*' it may be—we all hope it will be ; but it is unmistakably Twentieth Century. This is how the period is described :—

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

‘The general situation was a curious one. Some two years before this time a strong and long-lived Tory Government had come to an end. Since then all had been confusion in English politics. A weak Liberal Government, undermined by Socialist rebellion, had lasted a short time, to be followed by an equally precarious Tory Ministry, in which Lord Maxwell—after an absence of four years or so—returned to his party only to break it up. For he succeeded in imposing upon them a measure in which his own deepest convictions and feelings were concerned, and which had behind it the support of all the most important trade unions. Upon that measure the Ministry fell; but during their short administration Maxwell had made so great an impression upon his own side that when they returned, as they did return with an enlarged majority, the Maxwell Bill retained one of the foremost places in their programme, and might be said, indeed, at the present moment to hold the centre of the political field.’

This, of course, is a description of a political era which has not yet dawned. Still, it need not be imagined by the reader, and, perhaps, was not in fact imagined by the writer, as very far ahead of us. We are living now under a Tory, or quasi-Tory Government, which is undoubtedly ‘strong,’ and which is expected to be ‘long-lived.’ Suppose it to have lived out the natural life of Parliament, or that term as limited by usage; and allow for the lapse of two more years to cover the careers of the ‘weak Liberal Government,’ the ‘precarious Tory Ministry’ which succeeded it, and the Dissolution and General Election which were followed by the return of the last Administration with an ‘enlarged majority,’ and we get 1903 or 1904 as the date at which the novel opens. And since, though one might not care to prophesy as

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

much, it is, at least, an only too plausible forecast of the then state of political groups, that the old Liberal party should by that time have been 'almost swept away' (is there much of it left even in 1897?) and that 'a large Independent Labour and Socialist party' should fill 'the empty benches of the Liberals,' we are entitled to expect complete 'actuality' in treatment. *Sir George Tressady* is not one of those fantasies of the future in which the author may give as much scope to imagination as he pleases. It is nothing if not a realistic account of the sayings and doings of men and women—of Ministers and Ministers' wives, of philanthropists, male and female, of politicians great and small, of lady-wirepullers and lady-slummers, of Socialistic agitators, and Trade Union 'bosses,' and private secretaries, and Parliamentary hangers-on—exactly or substantially as these types exist among us at the present day. They are all, or nearly all of them to be found in the novel ; and of course, therefore, we expect, in spite of the slight difference of period, to find them all in their 'habit as they lived,' and playing such parts as they might be expected to play at the present day. And the 'habit is all right enough, but—the parts they play ! Mrs. Ward sketches them so spiritedly, and costumes them so accurately, that it irritates one to find them set to perform in a —what are we to call it?—piece of political *féerie*, the

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

extravaganza of 'The Marvellous Marcella,' or 'The Lovely Lady and the Prostrate Politician.'

The incongruity is made the more glaring by the faithfulness with which present-day actuality is, up to a certain point, adhered to. Mrs. Ward evidently does not contemplate any revolutionary change of social conditions, as the result or accompaniment of the political developments to which she introduces us. The volcanic upheaval of Socialism is to bring no *nouvelle couches sociales* to the surface. The political machine is still to be 'run,' as now, by the aristocracy: an 'earnest,' passionate aristocracy, it is true, but more aristocratic than ever, and certainly, in the Disraelian phrase, no less remarkable than of old for the 'sustained and stately splendour of their lives.' As the hero enters Marcella's house in St. James's Square—Marcella, who had the night before driven home in a hansom to save her only pair of horses—'one mute and splendid person relieved him of his coat, and another, equally mute and equally unsurpassable, waited for him on the stairs, while across a passage beyond the hall he saw two red-liveried footmen carrying tea.' Whereat he remarks to himself, not unnaturally, as he mounts the staircase, 'When one is a friend of the people, is one limited in horses but not in flunkies? These things are obscure.' The butler lifted a velvet curtain and

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

pronounced the visitor's name with a tone and emphasis as perfectly trained as the rest of him. It is a 'pretty, disorderly place,' the room into which he is ushered ; a room which 'made a friend of you as you entered.' The house generally is charming. So is Maxwell Court, their country house. Sir George's is ugly, but it commands a fine prospect, and he is himself, as we know, a baronet. Few of the characters, and none of the leading or influential ones, are anything so low as commoners. Marcella's husband is Lord Maxwell ; the leader of the Opposition has a courtesy title as the eldest son of a peer. The bold bad man with whom the heroine flirts to make the hero jealous is a peer. The lively lady who supplies, though with no very exhilarating results, that doubtful ingredient of levity known to serious dramatists as 'comic relief,' is a baronet's wife ; while the only important female character in the story who is plain Mrs., is the mother of a young man who had succeeded to an earldom since his father's unfortunate death as a commoner, and, if the youngest, is, on the other hand, as one gathers, the richest and most largely rent-rolled noble of them all.

All this is enough to show that that continuity of the aristocratic tradition in English politics which was so steadily maintained from the Thirties to the Sixties, from the era of Lord Marney and Lord Milford, and Lady Deloraine and Lady St. Julians and Lady Fire-

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

brace, to the era of the Duke of St. Bungay and Lord Brentford, and Lady Laura Kennedy, and Lady Glencora Palliser, will, according to Mrs. Ward's forecast, be still flourishing vigorously in the Twentieth century. To those who have studied the *ethos* of the modern Radical, it seems eminently probable that it will ; and we may assume that at the supposed date of *Sir George Tressady*, which, as has been pointed out, is evidently not very far advanced in the coming century, the actual representatives of that tradition will be very much like what they are to-day. Hence its imaginary representatives in Mrs. Ward's novel may fairly enough be treated as though they were sketches from contemporary life, and both in externals and internals, as regards speech, idea, and action, be judged accordingly.

Externally speaking, then, it may be admitted that not a few of these portraits are successful. Lord Fontenoy, who is a sort of mixture of Lord Randolph Churchill and Lord George Bentinck, is distinctly good ; and Lord Maxwell, though a little shadowy, is not amiss. Mr. Bennett, the labour member, is also well observed, and touched in, slight sketch as he is, with a truthful and not unkindly hand. Many, too, of the minor political personages—the private secretary ; the 'society' youth who collaborates with Fontenoy in the literary defence of the 'fourth party' views, and the attack on the Maxwell policy ; the

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

unwilling young country squire, Sir Frank Levan, spirited up to politics by his restless wife, are vital if not very vivacious figures ; and the scenes of private life in which they figure are certainly far superior to those mechanical dialogues among lifeless puppets which cover so many pages of *Phineas Finn*. If the reader is not always passionately interested in the subject of their conversation, they do, at least, talk as though they were interested in it themselves, which is more than can be said of Mr. Trollope's languid interlocutors ; though it is no doubt only fair to remember that current political talk in England was never more bookish, priggish, and deadly dull than during the smug Whig ascendancy of the Sixties, and that a description of a Liberal 'symposium' in those days would have been romantically and, indeed, sensationaly over-coloured, if it had represented the symposiasts as having blood instead of ink in their veins.

What may be called, then, the *mise-en-scène* of this latest of political novels is always well and often excellently managed. The 'earnestness' of the conversation is apt to be a little oppressive ; but this is true enough to that life of to-day which concerns itself actively with politics, and for aught we know may be truer still to the life of 1903. If the photographic portrait of a 'group,' were quite the same thing as a complete work of art, *Sir George Tressady*

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

would stand very high indeed; and, as photographic portraits of this kind should be of much service to the historian, its historic value may prove considerable. It is especially interesting and amusing to compare the light-minded drawing-room politics of Disraeli's time, its 'mainly-about-people' tone, and its rare and slightly contemptuous references to *the* people, with the solemn salon-chatter of this novel, where everyone, down to the most irresponsible young party 'item,' evidently talks with his constituents and his caucus always in his eye, and the first duty of 'keeping in touch with the Democracy' for ever in his mind. No doubt this profound and important contrast has been quite correctly displayed by Mrs. Ward, and solemn as is the chatter with which the political ladies and their disciples amuse or rather edify themselves and each other in her pages, its solemnity has not been materially overdrawn. But the greater art, which would have shown these well-meaning but fussy and pretentious personages (as most of them at bottom really are) in their true relation to the great eternal forces of human nature which they play at directing—this greater art is to seek in Mrs. Ward's novel. And the reason why it is absent is not to seek at all. It is due to the lack of that power of self-detachment which is never found apart from—which perhaps *is*—the sense of humour. Mrs. Ward can survey her minor charac-

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

ters from the outside. In some of their aspects or attitudes she can contemplate even the central figures of her story in the same way. But where they are giving utterance to her own long-pondered thoughts, where they are personifying her own passionately cherished ideals, where, in other words, they are speaking, feeling, or acting as she would have men speak, feel, and act, she is wholly unable to detach herself from them, and view them as the painter views his unfinished picture, or the sculptor his half-modelled clay. They are herself, and the ability to detach herself from them would imply just that power of self-detachment which her writings so abundantly show that she does not possess. And thus it is that Mrs. Ward, while comparatively failing where Disraeli so memorably succeeded, succeeds no better than Disraeli where Disraeli failed. Her presentation of the lighter side of English political life is accurate, and in its way interesting and historically valuable, but it is wholly wanting in that brilliant satiric touch which has made Disraeli's novels live as literature when their political significance has utterly passed away. On the other hand, her attempt to interweave serious romance-interest with the realities of serious contemporary politics, has as completely missed the mark as his. The loves of Egremont and Sybil do not more thoroughly deserve to be described as 'a fairy-tale of the Young England Movement,'

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

than does the capture of Sir George Tressady by Marcella Maxwell deserve to be described as a 'fairy-tale of the New Socialism.'

And from the exigencies of this *conte fantastique* the realistic, or what are meant to be the realistic, scenes and incidents of the story are continually suffering. Its very climacteric situation is disastrously affected by them. The varying fortunes of the Maxwell Bill, and their culmination in the great debate in which the hero deserts his party, are handled throughout by Mrs. Ward in a manner which has been justly praised. Critics, who perhaps know more about novels than about the proceedings of the House of Commons, or the agitations of its lobby, have been much moved by the pages in which these things are described. Some of them, apparently, have been made to realise, with a wholly unfamiliar intensity, the excitement of a great political struggle as it is felt by the combatants themselves; and I do not for a moment deny that the history of these events is related by this vigorous writer with no little dramatic power. Nor to the description of the critical night's debate itself—a class of descriptive effort in which Trollope so signally and spiritlessly failed—is there any exception to be taken, save one. But that one is almost as important as the exception to the general excellence of the lady whose 'only fault,' according to Talleyrand, was that she was

‘intolerable.’ Its central incident is incredible—materially and formally incredible. It is possible to conceive a politician changing his opinion as to a Bill in the course of its passage through the House, and both speaking and voting against his party on a vital clause in its provisions. But it is *not* possible to imagine him keeping this change in his opinions a dead secret from his leader and his colleagues till he announced it in his place in the House; and it is a thousand times impossible—unless he deliberately intended to play the game of a traitorous wrecker of his party, and Sir George Tressady is represented as a man of scrupulous honour—that he should delay the announcement until the very eve of the division, and then spring it upon his party in the manner best calculated, not merely to insure their defeat, but to hurry them into utter rout and collapse. It is passing strange that Mrs. Ward, who shows so intimate an acquaintance with the English political code of conduct, should have made her hero commit an act so fatal, not only to his credit as a politician, but to his honour as a gentleman.

So much for the material incredibility of Sir George’s *gran rifiuto*; its formal incredibility—the monstrosity of the means by which the incredible act is brought to pass—is more flagrant still. Tressady is not described as the victim of one of those sudden and violent attacks of love-madness which shatter

men's characters and paralyze their wills. It is true he has a certain artistic appreciation of Marcella's physical beauty; but his feeling for her consists far more largely of respect for her intellectual powers, admiration of her nobility of character, and sympathy with her social ideals. These motives, least of all the last, which seems ultimately to have determined his action, are none of them potent enough to make an honourable man break loose from all the restraints of honour. Nor is he even represented as having been intellectually converted to the lady's opinions. At best, she has only made him uneasily distrustful of his own; and indeed at the very last he avows to himself that his real reason for throwing over his party and bringing about the defeat of their policy is that he may make Marcella a present of 'her heart's desire!' In other words, because a beautiful, accomplished, and nobly altruistic lady ardently desires the success of certain legislation which he had always regarded as injuriously affecting the rights and liberties of his countrymen, he feels himself compelled to give her what she wants! The motive is so glaringly inadequate to account for Sir George Tressady's action, that there is only one way of explaining the appearance of adequacy which it must have presented to Mrs. Ward. She is a good deal more in love with Marcella than is her hero himself.

It is, in fact, the idealisation of Marcella which has

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

converted what might have been a powerful novel into a 'fairy tale of the New Socialism.' Lady Maxwell, with her surpassing beauty and sweetness, her passionate sympathy with suffering, her passionate devotion to her husband, her irresistible power over all sorts and conditions of men and, what is much more wonderful, women, including even the woman in whom she has unwittingly, though not unnaturally, aroused the passion of jealousy to a furious pitch—and let it here be parenthetically said, that the impossible scene in which Marcella subdues Letty redounds immensely to the credit of Mrs. Ward's artistic dexterity in being made as plausible as it is—is undeniably a fascinating figure; but its fascination is elaborated to a point at which it ceases to be of this world. Her charms, both of aspect and nature, are insisted on till she impresses one merely as a radiant angel with a house in St. James's Square; nor do those foibles of generous imprudence, which Mrs. Ward imputes to her with the praiseworthy intention of giving a touch of the human to her angelic perfections, avail to humanize her. For, after all, they are precisely the sort of foibles which a radiant angel, 'dumped down' in the midst of London society, might be expected to display.

The same deflection of the artistic needle by the disturbance of vehement political or politico-social aspirations, is visible indeed throughout the whole

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

story. The legislative crisis which Mrs. Ward has imagined, and upon which she has built the plot of her novel, is no doubt a serious one; but even this, in a certain sense, she takes a little too seriously. She writes as though the country may expect to find itself, within another decade, in the throes of a semi-Socialistic revolution. That forecast may possibly, of course, prove accurate; but if Mrs. Ward had read her *Sybil* as carefully and with as much reflection as it deserves, she would have seen how easy it is for speculations of this sort to take a prematurely alarmist shape. A comparison between the social conditions described in the second story of the Disraelian trilogy, and those which are presented to us in *Sir George Tressady*, displays the futility alike of human hopes and human fears with the bitterest and saddest irony in which the Fates have ever indulged. There is hardly a moan of suffering from the victims of our industrial system, hardly a sigh of sympathy with the sufferers, hardly a cry of passionate indignation against the iron law whereby they suffer, which is not equally audible in the utterances of these two writers divided from each other by an interval of more than fifty years. Nor, to all appearance, is the earlier writer less profoundly convinced than the later that English society is treading the edge of a volcano. To him, as to her, it seems as if the State must solve the problem of poverty, must

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

compose the everlasting quarrel between the Haves and the Have-nots finally and forthwith, or perish. Before the eyes of both of them these great and painful issues loom so large as to occupy the whole field of politics, and to exclude all other political objects and questions from the view. To both it seems that now is the appointed time, now is the day of salvation, or of perdition, as the case may be. The same note is heard all through the *Past and Present* of Carlyle. To the thinkers of half a century ago it seemed no less certain than it seems to the thinker of to-day, that the mighty riddle was being propounded for the last time of asking, and that the propounder would brook no delay. Yet the half-century has run its course, and the Sphinx and Oedipus still stand confronting each other in the same expectant attitude. Oedipus has neither answered the riddle nor given it up ; the Sphinx has neither dashed herself against the rock nor claimed her prey.

I admit that the irony of this protracted situation is much too grim for laughter ; but it must be perceived and felt, if that situation is to be handled in the spirit and with the detachment of the artist. And it is because, among other reasons noted above, Mrs. Ward is wanting, unlike Disraeli, in the power of detachment ; it is because she feels the 'pity of it' too much and the irony of it too little ; because, with all the passion of the social reformer, she flings her-

THE POLITICAL NOVEL

self, and her characters with herself, into the thick of a struggle which she should survey from without—that *Sir George Tressady* has failed, with all its brilliancy and power, to attain that rank as a political novel to which the genius of its author might otherwise have raised it.

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

A DIALOGUE

Brooks. Middleway, I am afraid we are boring you.

Middleway. Not in the least, my dear fellow. Disputes like yours are most refreshing to me: they seem to provide such a complete answer to all complaints of the excessive preoccupation of the age. Everything is to be hoped for a community in which men find time and taste for such serious frivolities as this discussion of yours.

Carlton. Frivolity or not, you must allow that it is an interesting subject of speculation.

M. Interesting? It possesses every quality which lends charm to controversy. You start upon it without either data or definitions, thereby saving a tedious preliminary wrangle about the meaning of terms; and the dispute itself can leave no bad blood behind it, because it is impossible, in the nature of things, for either of you to obtain the slightest advantage over the other.

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

B. There I don't at all agree with you.

C. Nor I.

M. I dare say not. But you would have a better chance of persuading me that one of you is getting the better of the other if you could satisfy me that you have ever come to blows at all.

C. How do you mean ?

M. Well, I may be mistaken ; but your controversy certainly reminds me of the proverbial battle between the dog and the fish. You, Carlton, keep barking out statistics, while Brooks is lashing his tail nobly in a stream of generalities.

C. I don't see it. Brooks maintains that Liberalism is the natural politics of a man of letters ; and as the best way of overthrowing the assertion, I enumerate a long list—

B. A *long* list, you call it ?

C. Yes ; I say a long list of distinguished literary men whose way of thinking is profoundly Conservative.

M. Yes ; and then Brooks sets up the overthrown assertion on its legs again, and *da capo*. For, of course, some half-dozen distinguished literary men can no more prove the natural tendency of literature towards Conservatism than Brooks's intuitive conclusions prove its affinity with his own political creed.

B. What is your own opinion on the point ?

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

M. On which point? I have already told you that you seem to me to be debating two. You, Carlton, would like me to agree with you, that the most eminent men of letters of the day—a body numbering, let us say, about a dozen all told—happen at the moment to lean to Conservative opinions. Brooks, on the other hand, wants me to say that the literary occupation, and the habit of mind which it presupposes, or begets and strengthens, tend to make Liberals of those who follow the one and share the other. I see nothing to prevent my agreeing with both of you; but to do so, though gratifying to my feelings, would be of no great assistance to the settlement of your dispute.

C. Very well then. I will waive my own contention, and join issue with Brooks on his own terms. I deny that the natural tendency of literature is towards Liberalism, and I affirm that the contrary is the truth. Now what do you say?

M. I say, first, that I should like to know what you mean by literature. How do you define a literary man?

C. Well, it will be sufficient for my purpose to define him as a man whose sole, or at any rate chief, occupation is that of writing.

M. Observe the inexactitude of the Conservative mind. Why, that would serve for the definition of a secretary, of a clerk, of a shorthand reporter, of a

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

transcriber in a Government office. A little more precision, please. Writing what?

C. What? Oh, anything which involves independent thought and original composition. Novels, poems, essays, biographies.

M. Political 'leaders'? Do you include journalists?

C. Oh, no.

B. Certainly not.

M. Wonderful unanimity! But not very complimentary, perhaps, to the rejected of both parties. You don't think, then, that the journalist has any 'natural' politics?

B. Why, of course not, my dear Middleway. Or, if he has, he cures himself of them, as he does of other unprofessional habits. You might as well talk of the 'natural' view of a barrister on a question of law. The business of the journalist is advocacy.

M. I like your frankness. His political tendencies, you mean, are those of his clients, and his clients are the proprietors of newspapers?

B. I don't quite say that.

M. No; you are too polite to say it. But you are too intelligent not to mean it. Let us pass the journalists. Is a historian a man of letters?

B. In one sense, of course, he is—in the highest sense, perhaps: but for the purposes of this discussion I think he ought to be excluded.

M. In the name of wonder, why?

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

B. Because he is a student of political phenomena first, and a literary man afterwards. The view which he takes of contemporary politics will be determined by the political philosophy which he has constructed from his researches into, and his reflections upon, the politics of the past.

M. But what of that?

B. Well, in that case, his political prepossessions, whatever they are, will have a political, and not a literary origin. If he is a Liberal or a Conservative in contemporary politics, it will be simply because he is a Liberal or a Conservative historian.

C. Always supposing, you mean, that the process has not been reversed, and that he is not merely a politician who has taken to styling his political pamphlets——

M. The ‘history of his own times’? Yes; Brooks, I am sure, will be magnanimous enough to exclude that variety of Liberal historian also.

B. I am willing to exclude all varieties. If the historian *began* as a party politician, the case, of course, is simple. But even if he only *ends* as a party politician, his opinions, I say, will have had a political, and not a literary origin. He will be a Liberal or a Conservative simply because inquiry and thought, as applied to bygone events, have convinced him that Liberalism or Conservatism furnishes, on the whole, the safer standpoint from which to judge the

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

events and movements of the time. And a political creed of that sort has no connection whatever with the literary 'ethos' as such.

M. Oh, then your conception of literature excludes the ideas of thought and inquiry ?

B. That is good enough as 'chaff,' but, of course, you know very well what I mean. I will put it this way. The politics of a historian have no more to do with his being a man of letters than have the politics of a professional politician who may happen to be a man of letters also. You would not say, for instance, that Burke's Whiggery, or his Old Whiggery either, was a result of the literary habit.

M. Indeed I should. Your illustration is most unfortunate. Burke I consider a typical example of the politician whose politics are formed in the study. But never mind. Let us pass the historian too. We have now dismissed one set of literary men as having no natural bias in politics, and another set as having no bias derived from the literary profession. Let us go a little further. Scientific men, I suppose, you would certainly exclude ?

B. H'm, yes; though it would be to my interest to include them.

C. Eh ?

B. What ? You dispute that ?

C. Dispute it ! You surely haven't the effrontery to maintain that Science is Liberal ?

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

B. Why, how could she possibly ally herself with the party of theological bigotry ?

C. That is not confined to either party.

B. Perhaps not ; but I think I remember a certain famous discussion in which your side had the best of it, both in votes and prejudices.

C. You are hugely mistaken, if you imagine that Science ever troubled her head about *that* dispute. Science, in these times, is eminently respectable, and Mr. Bradlaugh's cause was eminently the reverse. Scientific men don't want to run a-muck against religion, Tom Paine fashion, nowadays. They are quite content to keep to their laboratories and lecture-rooms, and leave you alone, if you will only let them alone. But that is exactly what you Liberals won't consent to do. You are perpetually worrying them, and they detest you in consequence.

B. What ! merely because we object to give them the absolute rights which they claim over the lower animals, and indeed—if we may couple mental anguish with physical torture—over the whole sentient world ? If they detest those who would simply—

M. Forgive me, my dear Brooks, for recalling you to the point. The question is not whether men of science ought to be disgusted with contemporary Liberalism, but whether they are. And on that point I confess I think Carlton is in the right. The estrangement between you appears to me complete.

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

B. Oh, impossible! You have been both of you misled by a few sallies of petulant savants, or a few ineptitudes of the scientific prig. As the common friends of progress, Science and Liberalism *must* be in accord.

M. Oh, of course. Two friends of a word are bound to love each other—especially when it is a word which each interprets differently. It reminds me of those sudden and mistaken salutations of social life: ‘I think you know Mr. So-and-So.’ ‘To be sure. Delighted to have met you.’ You shake hands warmly, and half an hour afterwards you find that the friend of your new-made acquaintance is not your own friend, but a highly objectionable namesake of his.

B. Nonsense! That is not at all the case here. Our Conservative critics may make their minds perfectly easy on that score. Liberalism and Science thoroughly understand each other, and, whatever transitory and superficial difference may divide them, you may take my word for it that they are the best of friends.

M. Theoretically, perhaps; but practically? Liberalism in the abstract is devoted to the cause of science; but unfortunately there seems to be always something which the concrete Liberal prefers to her interests. Now it is a rabbit; now a baby sickening for the small-pox in a crowded district; now the Doll Tearsheet of a garrison town. What value do you

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

suppose a man of science can attach to the friendship of men who are continually sacrificing the fruits of his labours and the blessings of his discoveries to crotchets of their own?

B. The divergence of paths is only temporary. The man of science has gone astray, as the mere student will. Absorbed in his own ideals, he has lost touch of considerations to which the man of action and affairs is naturally alive. We shall recall him in time to a juster appreciation of those rights of others which he is now disposed to ignore.

C. And you think that that is the only note of discord between Liberalism and Science? You think that if what Middleway calls the 'rabbit' difficulty could be settled, together with the other two which he mentioned, there would be nothing to hinder Science and Liberalism from falling into each other's arms?

B. I don't think it—I am sure of it.

C. Sacred simplicity! What do you say, Middleway?

M. Nothing. I am waiting to hear what Brooks says.

B. And I need not wait to hear what Carlton says, because I already guess what he means. He has picked up from some pseudo-philosophic anti-Radical the argument that modern science, being simply the evangelist of evolution, must necessarily take the

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

colour of her politics from a biological theory which is 'not democratic, but aristocratic through and through.' I think that is the way our instructors are accustomed to put it; and confess now, Carlton, wasn't that the thunder you were going to pass off as your own?

C. I was not conscious of the intention of 'passing off' anything as my own; but I had always supposed that good arguments were common property, and I certainly did propose to make use of the one you have cited. What have you to say to it?

B. Simply that it is an ingenuity of the study; that it is, on the face of it, an excogitation of the man of books, and not a reflection which has suggested itself to the man of action from his observation of practical affairs.

C. That is merely your way of putting it; but, supposing you are right, I can't see the force of your reply.

B. Can't you? I should have thought it was obvious; but I will put it in the concrete form. Some ingenious Conservative essayist or other, casting about for new arguments against the principles of Liberalism, suddenly bethinks himself of the fact which I suppose has been a commonplace for years to anybody who has ever thought about the matter—that, according to accepted scientific doctrine, the development of life on the globe has not been man-

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

aged by Nature on democratic principles, but on principles very much their reverse. Elated with this brilliant *aperçu*, he immediately proceeds to argue that what is true of life in general must be true of the human race in particular; and that scientific men must thereby be vehemently opposed to the Liberal theory of the progress and prospects of humanity. Isn't that the history of the argument?

C. No doubt it is.

B. Well, what is it worth, then? Why, in the first place, nothing can be more absurd than to call it an argument against any one political creed. It is an argument against civilisation itself. There was a time when the human species *did* develop itself by the same law of evolution as governs the lower forms of life to-day; but the then state of our race is described—by Conservatives I had imagined no less than by Liberals; but correct me if I am wrong—as barbarism. The ‘aristocratic’ doctrines of Nature no doubt prevailed then among us to their full extent; but the first effective protest against them was not Liberalism, but society. The social union of man was, in fact, the birth of the principle of democratic co-operation, and the death of the aristocracy of individual strength. Man parted company with the politics of Nature from that hour, and your ingenious Conservative essayist should raise his voice, not against us poor Liberals, but against the human

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

race itself. He should look a little further back than the first Reform Bill, and attempt to conjure up the golden age of the flint. He should idealise a more genuine pre-Adamite than even Sir Charles Wetherell, and while his mind lingers fondly upon Tory 'Dragons of the prime, That tear each other in the slime,' he should deplore the fatal error which was committed when man first took to walled cities and invented morality and laws.

M. Bravo, Brooks! That's really a colourable imitation of eloquence. At least I have heard after-dinner speakers cheered for a less coherent and even for a less grammatical string of sentences.

B. You're very good.

M. Not at all. I feel that it is only fair to do justice to the form of your remarks, as I shall again have to comment on the irrelevance of their matter. Nothing I know is so disagreeable as sticking to the point when you are conscious of having some excellent thing to say which has nothing to do with it. But, disagreeable as it is, there is no other way of advancing the progress of a controversy, and I must really point out to you that you have not answered Carlton's argument at all.

B. Indeed? I thought I had proved that——

M. You have quite sufficiently proved that no man, whether savant or Conservative essayist, or what not, can reasonably make Liberalism responsi-

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

ble for principles of which the very existence of society is itself the expression. But Carlton is not concerned to dispute that. His argument, as I understand it, may be stated thus: The principles upon which Nature works, when exempt from the artificial interference of man, are essentially aristocratic principles. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest is an essentially aristocratic doctrine. The law of evolution is a law of privilege. 'The weakest goes to the wall,' supplies a good rhyme to, but an ill paraphrase of, 'equality for all.' The one, in fact, is the exact antipodes of the other; and since Science is engaged in the continual contemplation of the aristocratic doctrine, while Liberalism is specially devoted to the illustration and development of the democratic theory, the question is whether this does not tend to encourage—rationally or irrationally, matters not—an antagonism of tendencies between the two in their way of regarding political phenomena.

C. That's exactly the form in which I wish my argument to be stated. Thank you, Middleway.

M. Withhold your thanks a little while. I am afraid you will find I don't deserve them. But first, what do you say, Brooks, to the argument as I have just stated it?

B. Well, as I gather from your last hint that you are about to fall foul of my adversary, I withdraw my opposition. I will admit provisionally that there

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

is, in the way you put it, a natural antagonism of political tendency between Liberalism and Science. And now let us see you 'go for' Carlton.

C. I don't quite see how you can count upon that pleasure. Your surrender is my victory.

B. Is it? We shall see. I can guess the very manner of your discomfiture. If Liberal theories offend the prepossessions of science, what sort of response does Conservatism make to them? That is the question you are going to ask, I suppose, Middleway?

M. Yes; unless Carlton anticipates it with the answer, which he doesn't seem disposed to do. He has very rightly insisted that the man of science is likely to be prejudiced against democratic ideas by continual study of a principle so aristocratic as that on which Nature is accustomed to work. But now I want to hear from him why he thinks, or assumes, that the man of science is likely to be drawn towards his own party on that account?

C. Well, he would be drawn towards us, I think, in virtue of the very opposition of our principles to democratic ideas.

M. He would be attracted to you as to the representatives of the aristocratic principle, you mean?

C. Yes; if you like to put it so.

M. And you consider, then, that Nature and the Conservative party interpret and apply this principle

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

in the same way? That we have called it in each case by the common name 'aristocratic' seems enough for you. How much has language to answer for when it can betray a man of intelligence into such an absurdity as that!

C. Do you mean to say, then, that there is no analogy between the 'supremacy of the best' as it appears in Nature and as it has been illustrated in political institutions?

M. Do you mean to say that what a Conservative would call 'the best' is what Nature would call 'the fittest'?

C. Why not?

B. Why not? You had better ask the House of Lords. You had better consider the patronage system in the matter of appointments. Why, the monarchical principle itself—but, however, I need not shock your courtliness by going into that. I will merely ask you whether you think an hereditary peerage represents the principle of the 'supremacy of the fittest'?

M. I have seen it argued that it does—the ingenious disputant appealing in support of his argument to the titles conferred occasionally upon the successful soldier or civil administrator, and periodically upon a certain number of able lawyers.

B. To which you replied?

M. To which I replied that the analogy was most

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

exact and happy—for a single generation ; but that, unfortunately for its further application, Nature was in the habit of conferring life peerages alone.

B. Good. What did he say to that ?

M. I did not give him time to say anything. I went on to add that I would admit the force of his argument when he could show me a short-necked giraffe supported in ease and comfort by Nature in consideration of the distinguished cervical development of its ancestors. Nature, I said, appears to me to have a thorough appreciation of personal fitness, but of the hereditary variety, so familiar to politicians, she seems to have no comprehension at all. Obviously she cannot grasp the idea of an inherited aptitude for browsing the leaves of trees which your neck is too short to reach.

C. This seems to me very poor jesting.

M. I don't wonder you find it so ; but you have always the resource of treating it as serious argument and attempting to answer it. Come, my dear Carlton, you cannot possibly claim the sympathy of science for Conservatism on the ground that your party represents the principle of the supremacy of the fittest. The paradox is too audacious. Conservatism and accidental privilege have been too long associated in popular language to allow you any hope of severing them.

B. Quite so ; and that just brings us to the point

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

at which, as I contend, the sympathy of Liberalism and science begins. It is Liberalism after all, and Liberalism alone, which has unshackled and given scope to the energies of the human race—thereby rendering possible the vast material progress which the race has made, and even contributing in a great measure to the splendid victories which science herself has won. She would be guilty of the worst ingratitude if she were really capable of looking coldly on her benefactor.

C. Ah ! that's all very well ; but, understanding gratitude as a sense of favours to come, I should like to know from which of the two parties science is most likely to receive them.

B. From ours ! Not a doubt of it. There *cannot* be any permanent antagonism between the man who labours for the human race, and the man who believes in the human race ; nor can there ever be more than a transitory alliance between him whose life is devoted to the interests of the many, and him who has to uphold the privileges of the few. Liberalism and science have, at any rate, a common *ideal*—the advancement of mankind—an ideal which Conservatism either does not believe in, or does not care for. The Liberal politician may thwart the man of science in such matters as vivisection and the repression of disease, and the two may quarrel angrily enough about it ; but each knows at the bottom of his heart

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

that his temporary opponent is equally with himself a labourer in the cause of man. They differ as to the relative importance of moral and physical factors in the sum of man's well-being, that is all. But in any difference between science and Conservatism this can never be so.

C. What a magnificent specimen of Liberal arrogance! Your party has, of course, a monopoly of interest in human welfare.

B. I have never said so; and it would be as absurd as to say that Haroun Al-Raschid took no interest in the welfare of his people. What I meant was that the Conservative—I mean the really thoughtful and logical Conservative as distinguished from the political speculators on, or perhaps I ought to say 'in,' the adventure of 'Tory Democracy'—does not believe in the self-directing, self-sufficing quality of the mass of mankind, or believes in it only as a possibility of some so remote future as to warrant him in treating it for immediate practical purposes as non-existent. And I say that, while the Conservative rejects this belief, both the Liberal and the man of science are fundamentally agreed in holding it.

M. What a charm there is in the discursiveness of an argument! Now, who would imagine that all this animated dispute about the tendencies of science is really episodical to the main issue? But it is, though.

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

C. Surely not.

M. Indeed it is. You undertook to discuss the politics of literature, or, in other words, the political tendencies of the literary habit, and you have branched off into a debate upon the politics of scientific men, whom Brooks at the outset declined, for the purposes of the discussion, to include in the literary class at all.

C. Well, we have disposed of most varieties of the men who employ pen, ink, and paper for the expression of their thoughts. Journalists, historians, *savants* have been successively brought up for examination as to their politics.

M. Yes; and since the studies of mental and moral philosophy are now treated as branches of physical science, there remains only the novelists, poets, essayists, &c., whom you first enumerated. We are reduced, in fact—if the word ‘reduced’ is not impertinent—to the *belles lettres*, which I suspect are, in popular language, pretty nearly equivalent to the word ‘literature.’

B. No doubt they are; and people are probably thinking exclusively of the poet, the novelist, the essayist, the critic, and so forth, when they talk of the politics of literary men.

C. Well, and what do you think *their* natural politics are?

B. Ah, there, at least, I can confidently meet

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

you. For what are the qualities which in the department of literature are supreme? Are they not imagination, sympathy, sensibility?

M. You leave out sense, I see. But surely the critic should have that, even if the poet and the novelist can dispense with it.

C. Yes, and how about taste and culture, which you have also omitted?

B. Thank you for multiplying my allies. Add taste and culture by all means. I am not afraid of them. They are on the side of our greater ideals, if they look coldly on some of our minor political claims.

M. Which, being interpreted, means that Mr. Matthew Arnold was an enthusiast for social equality, if he had no sympathy with the deceased wife's sister.

B. Exactly so.

M. Recollect, however, what an eclectic Mr. Arnold was.

C. Ay, and remember how much larger a share in the life of a political party is filled by these 'minor claims,' as you call them, compared with the 'greater ideals,' or, in other words, the vague abstractions which men may accept like the theological dogma which has no influence on their lives. In what aspect, after all, must the modern Liberal politician present himself to the man of taste and culture?

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

Surely not in the radiant if delusive semblance worn by the pioneers of the French Revolution to the English poets of the eighteenth century? Surely not as a builder of a new heaven and new earth, but rather as the mechanically-chosen exponent of the narrowest ideals of the English bourgeoisie.

B. But suppose that these ideals—

C. One moment; I am not saying that this view of English Liberalism is reasonable, but I do say that that is the aspect which it must naturally present to the eye of taste and culture.

B. I see you admire that variety of refinement which, if you will pardon the criticism, the most closely borders on vulgarity. You are the devotee of a form of 'taste' which is to the real article what the 'genteel person' is to the gentleman. Well, let us drop taste and culture. Imagination and sympathy surely do not tend to encourage that gross and swinish temperament which contentedly acquiesces in a world of remediable misery for a bribe of meat and drink. Imagination and sympathy in their higher developments must surely tend to make men—

C. Revolutionaries? yes; Liberals, no. I can quite understand your poetic Nihilist. What I cannot see is the romance of the Caucus.

M. I am entirely with you there, Carlton. A poet who likes to join hands with the Marxes and

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

Krapotkins of the era may indulge his imagination to any extent. A socialist democracy contains possibilities; its coming might be catastrophic or beneficent; but it would, at any rate, give promise of something less prosaic than the present. Now the promise of orthodox Liberalism is precisely the reverse, and, however unsatisfying the present may seem to imaginative and poetic minds, I cannot conceive it save as turning with disgust from a future in which democracy, with its vices sedulously fostered and its virtues repressed as inconvenient, is to be 'worked,' 'managed,' 'caucused,' by pushing members of the commercial capitalist class.

C. Quite so; and since imagination and feeling, since taste and culture, can find nothing to satisfy them, but rather everything to disgust them in the future foreshadowed to them by the so-called man of progress, they are naturally drawn towards that body who represent for them the beauty, the sanctity, the poetry of the past.

M. You mean, no doubt, the Society of Antiquaries.

B. Ha! ha!

C. Nonsense; I mean the Conservative party.

M. Oh, impossible! What on earth have the Conservative party to do with the past? It is true they have a sort of bowing acquaintance with it through the House of Peers, most of whom, however,

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

are ignorant of their own pedigrees, and some of the greatest of whom are turning their historic heirlooms, as fast as may be, into current coin of the realm ; but the party, as a party, is avowedly, even ostentatiously, *parvenu*. Lord Beaconsfield, they are always telling us, was their political father ; they have, consequently, no political grandfather, and they are proud of it. That may be a capital way of commending themselves to the democracy ; I don't say it is not ; but you must take it with its consequences, and one of these is that modern Conservatism has no more appeal to romance, is not one whit less prosaic to the tips of its fingers, than modern Liberalism.

B. I thoroughly agree with you. That is, of course, I mean I agree with you that nothing can be more prosaic than modern Conservatism.

C. Well, what *I* should like to know is, what you really do think on the point under discussion ? For hitherto you seem to me to have done nothing but amuse yourself by knocking our heads together, which is not difficult when two men are wrestling.

M. I should think, then, that an attitude of such strict, if scarcely benevolent, neutrality might explain itself. Your dispute, my good friends, is, to the best of my judgment, idle. The literary man, as such, can have no tendency either to Liberalism or Conservatism as represented by the two political parties. Neither party has anything to attract him,

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

or rather, each has so much to repel him, that he must become an eclectic whether he will or no.

B. But never mind the parties. Surely his bias must be—every man's is—towards the *creed* of one party or towards that of the other?

M. Well, of course it must be; but that has no more to do with the practice of his calling than with the colour of his hair. It goes down to that great fundamental distinction of temperament which makes every man among us an optimist or a pessimist.

C. And which are you?

M. My dear Carlton, what an indiscreet question! To avow oneself an optimist is practically to undertake to fight all comers at all times of the day or night; to declare for pessimism is to get oneself turned out of the arena altogether and disqualified as 'unpractical.' The one creed threatens me with too much work, and the other would allow me too little. So please to understand that I am so far an optimist as to entitle no one to order me home to my study; while, if I ever talk the language of the pessimist, it is, as I have done to-day, in the strictest confidence of privacy.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

IT is just upon a hundred years since Wordsworth, in an unlucky moment for himself, excogitated and published an entirely new, original, and unsound theory of the poetic art. He was, however, fortunate in a power of performance far excelling the value of his precepts, and perhaps still more so in a public who remained absolutely indifferent to both until the latter had had time to be forgotten. With Mr. Matthew Arnold the case is very different. His poetic theories attracted as much attention as his poetry, if not more, and made warm partisans and vehement opponents throughout the world of English letters. Hence a certain difficulty in fixing Mr. Arnold's own place in literature. It is impossible in considering the poet to forget the critic with whom we more or less enthusiastically agree or disagree; and the influence of one's own 'personal equation' is proportionally hard to exclude. His work, both in prose and poetry, but in the former especially, was distinguished by characteristics of the strongest individuality;

it displayed qualities which are as much over-rated by some minds as they are depreciated by others; it enforced doctrines—the prose by precept, the poetry by example—on the soundness of which men have differed since the dawn of literature, and will probably continue to differ until literature is extinguished by Volapuk. To have reasoned opinions on literature at all is to hold strong convictions, or at any rate to feel strongly, on the questions which Matthew Arnold's genius and teaching raised as with a standing challenge, and the critic who undertakes to review his literary work can hardly but be conscious of doing so from the standpoint, either of a convinced believer in his doctrines and method, or of a heretic hardened in their rejection. Such a one ought, perhaps, to be aware, therefore, that, in endeavouring to appraise the work of the departed poet and essayist, he runs a risk of supplying his readers with little else than an edifying disclosure of his own orthodoxy from the Arnoldian point of view on the theories in question. It says much for the artless simplicity of the critical guild that this apprehension seems to weigh so little on their minds. Those who have adopted, equally with those who dissent from, Mr. Arnold's canons of art have in many instances assigned him his place in English literature with a noble unconsciousness of the fact that they have been merely sitting in judgment

upon, and with judicial gravity deciding in favour of, their own prepossessions.

Mutely submitting to the obvious retort that I am about to afford an example of the precise foible in my own person, I propose at the outset to examine the comparative estimate of Mr. Arnold's poetic and prose work which has been formed and enunciated by the majority of his posthumous critics.

Now, the first reflection which suggests itself on this point might well be one of a somewhat painful character. It is only my intimate personal conviction that no such thing as a literary counterpart of Mrs. Candour is, or ever was, to be found among us—it is only this, I say, which assures me of the good faith and good nature of many of the familiar eulogies of Mr. Arnold. 'It is as a poet rather than as a prose-essayist,' runs the 'common form' of most of them, 'that Mr. Arnold will be remembered;' and then the eulogist goes on to say—not 'in the same breath;' he usually respires for two or three sentences before adding it—that 'to the great body of his countrymen Mr. Arnold as a poet is almost unknown.' He will be remembered, it seems, for those achievements which have failed to attract the attention of the public which is to remember him. Sometimes, it is true, the formula has been varied a little, to the advantage of logic; and we have been told that the works which failed to make Mr. Arnold known to the

MATTHEW ARNOLD

mass of his contemporaries will constitute his principal 'claim' to the 'remembrance of posterity.' The critics who prefer this phrase are careful not to commit themselves to the assertion that posterity will honour a draft which an earlier generation had returned on the hands of the drawer marked with the fatal superscription 'no effects.'

I am not so rash as to dispute the proposition that the poet was unknown to all but a very small fraction of those who were familiar enough with the name of the literary critic, the essayist on politics and manners, and, above all, perhaps, the amateur theologian. Indeed, the facts and dates of the matter speak for themselves. It is now upwards of forty years since Mr. Arnold gave to the world his first two volumes of poems—volumes which contain some of his best work. Some ten or twelve more years had to pass before his *Essays in Criticism* made their appearance, and it is safe to say that at that time very few, even of those who were sufficiently struck with the contents of his book to take the trouble to get its title correctly, (the *varia lectio* 'on' has not yet disappeared even from library catalogues,) had made as much as a bowing acquaintance with Mr. Arnold's earlier muse, or had ever read a line of the *New Poems* which had seen the light a year or so before. It was undoubtedly the 'Essays' that established his fame with that great world which can be persuaded by the 'persistent

hammering,' which Mr. Grant Allen has recommended, to read and to admire the excellent in prose, but *not*, or very, very rarely, the exquisite in verse. This great world was brought to perceive, or to take for granted, in default of perceptive power, that here was a critic, not only of rare technical ability, but one possessed of original and fertilizing conceptions on the subject of the critic's art, and the master, above all, of a style which, whatever fault might be found with it on other grounds, had become in his hands an instrument of marvellous delicacy and power. Then the great world condescended to see what this remarkable essayist and critic had written in rhyme and metre. And in the course of time they had got by heart the last eighteen lines of *Sohrab and Rustum*, and the handsome compliment to Sophocles at the end of the sonnet *To a Friend*, and the description of our Titan of empire, laden with 'the too vast orb of his fate,' and a few other elegant extracts of an equally convenient and portable kind.

But the great world never got further than that. They still continued, and they still continue, to prefer their 'favourites'—the two or three poets who have won their way to or beyond the place occupied for so many years in lonely majesty, like the broken column of Ozymandias, by the author of *Proverbial Philosophy*. They still prized, and prize above all others, the three bards whom they have respectively

MATTHEW ARNOLD

learned to love, been persuaded to admire, and taken at once and spontaneously to their hearts—Lord Tennyson, Mr. Browning, and Sir Lewis Morris. And since Mr. Arnold as a poet and Mr. Arnold's poems were and are in this position in the mind of the general public at the time of and since his lamented death, it follows that, to declare, as has been declared in so much recent criticism, that his future fame will depend upon his poetry, must mean one of two things: either it is a polite way of saying that Mr. Arnold is not destined to any future life at all in the popular recollection, or it amounts to a prediction that, sooner or later, the appreciation, now confined to a few, of his high excellence as a poet, will, as in the case of his master, Wordsworth, dawn gradually upon the perceptions of the great body of his countrymen. It is possible that Mr. Arnold himself entertained some expectation of the kind, and that his avowed belief in the continuing growth of Wordsworth's fame and influence was associated with a personal hope which would certainly not be unjustifiable on the part of one so deeply imbued with the Wordsworthian spirit as himself.

It is ill dogmatizing on a question so obviously incapable of more than a conjectural answer as this. No man's opinion as to what the public taste of ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred years hence will be in the matter of poetry can be worth much more than that

MATTHEW ARNOLD

of his neighbours; and, for all we know, the world may be reading Matthew Arnold with eager delight a century hence, while Sir Lewis Morris may have long sunk into neglect. The utmost one can say is that it is difficult to detect at present any forerunning sign whatever of either development of the public taste. I see no reason to doubt that poets who display Sir Lewis Morris's triumphant address in adapting themselves to the poetical likings of so vast a multitude of their fellow-countrymen will always find innumerable admirers worthy of them. I do not believe that the singer will either get ahead of the listener or the listener of the singer, but that the two will be kept abreast of each other by the link of a quality which Horace, though with a slight difference of application, has described as 'golden.'

On the other hand, I do not find any very convincing ground for the belief that the taste of any great multitudes of men in this or any other country will ever be powerfully attracted by poetry like that of Mr. Arnold. Even if the influence of Wordsworth should increase, instead of, as is at least as probable, diminishing, it does not follow that Mr. Arnold's would obtain additional acceptance on that account: for Wordsworth's appeal to the common mind is largely dependent upon a quality in his poetry which Mr. Arnold's is altogether without. Wordsworth lays firm hold of the religious instinct

MATTHEW ARNOLD

in man. His poetry, for all the mystical nature-worship that pervades it, was allied to a strongly and even almost narrowly personal Theistic creed. There is nothing in the poetry of his disciple to supply the place of this element, except that highly attenuated conception of the 'Something not ourselves which makes for righteousness,' so familiar to every student of the amateur theologian into which the poet and critic unfortunately declined. It will be a long time before the mass of mankind are willing to accept the 'stream of tendency' as a substitute for their no doubt crude and self-contradictory conceptions of a personal Creator; and when, if ever, they do, they will probably have ceased to care for poetry of the Wordsworthian and Arnoldian type at all. Science relieved by sensuousness appears to be the ideal to which not only poetry, but art of all kinds, is tending at the present day, and if the movement is a real and persistent, and not a merely apparent or merely temporary one, the ultimate effect of that movement must be to crowd out all poetry set mainly in the contemplative key, to whatever tenderness of feeling and truth of æsthetic vision it may be allied. For, so long as this key is maintained by a poet, he will probably never be able to compete for the favour of the average man with those rivals who proceed upon the sound assumption that the average man wants, as Goethe

said, not to be made to think, but merely to be made to feel.

In other words, it seems to me almost self-evident that poetry in order to be popular—and I do not intend the word in any disparaging sense; I merely mean that poetry, in order to be the poetry of the many and not of the few—must have something more than the power of delighting the imaginative part of man: it must deeply move his emotional part. The emotions stirred by it may be at any moral level you please, however high, or however low; but the stir, the exaltation, must be there. Moreover, it must be a genuine troubling of the waters of the spirit, and not merely an excitement of the aesthetic sensibilities discharging itself along the channels of emotion. What makes Byron's popularity so instructive is that we are so often in a position to say with absolute certainty that the exaltation produced by his poetry is wholly due to the former of these causes, and not in the least to the latter. For the form of the poetic utterance is sometimes so intolerably bad that we may be quite sure that the power of the passage lies exclusively in the thing uttered, and in our sympathy with the mood of the utterer. Lines which lash Mr. Swinburne into fury will powerfully impress a reader of a less exacting ear and a less fastidious taste. Mr. Arnold, so far as the faculty of expression goes, may be said to stand in

polar opposition to the author of *Childe Harold*, and, just as a critical admirer of the latter can almost always be sure that the pleasure given him by a passage of Byron is of its essence and not of its form, so he can nearly as often and with as complete confidence say that the pleasure given by a poem of Mr. Arnold is ultimately traceable to form rather than to essence. It is true that the pleasure is so intense and exquisite as to pass readily with those who are keenly susceptible to such pleasure into emotional exaltation. No critic, no one with any strong feeling for style, could find it in his heart to speak of Mr. Arnold's poetry as 'cold.' To such a reader it is not and never can be that; but it must be admitted, I think, that the glow which it takes in the mind of such a reader is largely, if not wholly, self-generated. The flawless perfection of Mr. Arnold's poetic work in its best specimens, the absolute sureness of his art when the artist is at his best, do much more than charm and satisfy. They kindle enthusiasm; they elate and excite all who are capable of being elated by mere beauty of form and mastery of workmanship; and it is easy for those upon whom this effect is produced to fancy for the moment that their elation and excitement are in some way associated with the matter rather than with the form of his poetry, and, in fact, that *their* emotions have taken fire from *his* imagination.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

My own impression—and I may perhaps trust it the more for feeling the incomparable literary charm of Mr. Arnold's best work as intensely as I do—my own impression is that the idea in question is a pure illusion; and that it is because it *is* an illusion that Matthew Arnold will never be more than ‘the poet of a few.’ It may sound paradoxical to say of one who was a genuine poet, and, on any intelligent estimate of him, a poet of no mean order, that he wrote without the genuine poetic impulse; but there is a sense, I believe, in which every competent critic will understand what I mean. It would be difficult, I think, to point to any poem of Mr. Arnold's in which he is thoroughly possessed by, instead of merely possessing, his subject—any poem in which feeling and expression are so interfused that the critical and uncritical readers are brought abreast of each other in an equality, though not in an identity, of delighted emotion. Mr. Arnold's poetic imagination was vigorous, subtle, elevated—what you please; but I question whether it ever reached a temperature at which this fusion of form and matter can take place.

It is true, no doubt, that an exceptionally large proportion of Mr. Arnold's work was of such a character as to render the correctness of this judgment difficult to test. His lyrical poems were usually the expression of subdued emotional moods, and in his

dramatic, or semi-dramatic, pieces, such as *Merope*, and, in a less degree, *Empedocles in Etna*, he aimed deliberately at that reserve and repression which is the secret of the Greek tragedians, and which he was too much and too dogmatically inclined to impose upon all poetry whatsoever. Some small portion of his work, however, was of a different character, and my point, perhaps, will appear with sufficient clearness in those poems in which the nature of the subject demands a more sustained ardour of imagination on the part of the poet than Mr. Arnold's subjects usually exacted from him. *The Forsaken Merman* is a piece which I know to be admired by at least one critic for whose judgment I entertain a high respect; and, like everything else that came from the hand of its author, it contains beautiful passages. But surely, considered as an attempt to give poetic expression to the feelings of the deserted 'King of the Sea,' and to move the reader's sympathies therewith, it is not only a failure, but a failure which trembles throughout upon the verge of the comic. Mr. Arnold had far too keen a sense of the ridiculous to be insensible to the peculiar dangers of his subject, and must have been perfectly well aware of the essential conditions of success in dealing with it. He must have known that the idea of the merman hovering, with his fishy offspring, about the little watering-place where the faithless wife and

MATTHEW ARNOLD

mother had taken up her abode, was one which, while it might be kept clear of the positively ludicrous by consummate tact and propriety of poetic treatment, would require much more than this to make it interesting and sympathetic. Art might avail to avoid the provocation of the smile of levity, but art alone would hardly avail in such a matter to convince incredulity. It was essential that the poet should believe most profoundly in, and should feel most intensely with, his own merman, to have any chance of producing a corresponding state of belief and feeling in the minds of his readers. But Mr. Arnold does not really believe in his forsaken merman a bit. He merely uses his subject as a canvas on which to paint a few such exquisite little marine pictures as that of the—

‘ Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
Where the winds are all asleep,
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,
Where the salt weed sways in the stream,
Where the sea-beasts ranged all round
Feed on the ooze of their pasture ground,
Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,
Dry their mail and bask in the brine :
Where great whales come sailing by,
Sail and sail, with unshut eye,
Round the world for ever and aye.’

Or he interprets the plaints of the forsaken merman in language which would be appropriate and touching enough in the mouth of Enoch Arden, but which

MATTHEW ARNOLD

leave us quite cold as the utterances of an amphibious being in whom we find that the author has no more genuine belief than we have ourselves. I can understand people admiring the poem, as the critical friend to whom I have referred appears to admire it—for its ‘purple patches;’ but I cannot understand anyone admiring it as a whole, or failing to recognize it as a work of which the initial poetic impulse was not energetic enough to secure the adequate accomplishment.

And I venture to maintain that, with the few and partial exceptions above referred to, Mr. Arnold’s poetry will be found full of positive or negative instances to the same effect throughout. It is not cold to the cultivated taste any more than the marbles of Phidias are cold, but to the natural man, to the man who has to be reached, if at all, through the emotions, rather than the æsthetic sensibilities, it *is* cold. The Horatian *Si vis me flere, &c.*, may or may not be a true maxim for the dramatic art, but it is assuredly true to this extent of the art poetic, that in all poetry which moves the common kind of humanity a certain thrill of agitation, a certain pulse of passion, is always to be felt. It would be absurd, of course, to deny that there are some short poems, and not a few passages perhaps here and there in longer poems, of Mr. Arnold’s in which this throb and pulsation may be felt. But they are composed in his rarer—nay, in

MATTHEW ARNOLD

his very rare—moods. He does not feel and write at this temperature for long. Such pieces as *Philomela* and *The Strayed Reveller* are specimens of a very limited class. In much the larger majority of his poems, and in all the longer ones, the key is distinctly lower, and yet it is in these that his mere *technique* is far and away at its best. Take, for instance, that most perfect of all his poems—more perfect, it seems to me, (though I suppose the opposite preference is more common,) than the *Thyrsis* itself—*The Scholar Gipsy*; and from this take the exquisite picture given in the following stanzas:—

‘ For most I know thou lov’st retired ground !
Thee at the ferry Oxford riders blithe,
 Returning home on summer nights, have met
Crossing the stripling Thames at Bablock-hithe,
 Trailing in the cool stream thy fingers wet,
 As the punt’s rope chops round ;
And leaning backward in a pensive dream,
 And fostering on thy lap a heap of flowers,
 Plucked in shy fields and distant Wychwood bowers,
 And thine eye resting on the moonlit stream.

‘ And then they land, and thou art seen no more !—
Maidens, who from the distant hamlets come,
 To dance around the Fyfield elm in May,
Oft through the darkening fields have seen thee roam,
 Or cross a stile into the public way.
 Oft thou hast given them store
Of flowers—the frail-leafed white anemone,
 Dark bluebells drenched with dews of summer eves,
 And purple orchises with spotted leaves—
 But none hath words she can report of thee.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

‘ And, above Godstow Bridge, when haytime’s here
In June, and many a scythe in sunshine flames,
Men who through those wide fields of breezy grass,
Where black-winged swallows haunt the glittering Thames
To bathe in the abandoned lasher pass,
Have often passed thee near,
Sitting upon the river bank o’ergrown ;
Marked thy outlandish garb, thy figure spare,
Thy dark vague eyes and soft abstracted air—
But when they came from bathing thou wert gone !

‘ At some lone homestead on the Cumnor hills,
Where at her open door the housewife darns,
Thou hast been seen, or hanging on a gate
To watch the threshers in the mossy barns.
Children who early range these slopes and late,
For cresses from the rills,
Have known thee eying, all an April day,
The springing pastures and the feeding kine ;
And marked thee, when the stars come out and shine,
Through the long dewy grass move slow away.’

That is pure essence of Arnold—a thoroughly typical example at once of his most characteristic manner and his most characteristic mood. No music could be sweeter; but how low, how plaintively minor is the key! Nothing could be more true and tender, nothing more deeply and sincerely felt than the mood which inspires it; but how alien, how incomprehensible to the mass of men? The very ‘scholar-gipsy’ himself, the aimless wanderer whom the poet meets in imagination at so many of the spots most familiar in the rural rambles of generations of Oxford students—what sort of a

figure does he present to this age of ours? What chance is there of his seizing on the imagination of our 'strenuous time' (Heaven help it!) and of the multitude who have made it what it is? To that multitude this exquisite poem can be nothing more than a fantastic, and indeed reprehensible, glorification of 'mooning.' If it shows, as no one surely will dispute that it does show, Mr. Arnold, not only at his best but at his most characteristic best, I might venture, I think, to risk the case for my contention on this one poem alone. No other example of his work is needed, as no better could be found, to show that we have here a poet who has as little chance of finding his way to the hearts of the restless and emotion-seeking Many as he is assured of a perpetual place in those of the quiet and contemplative Few.

If the foregoing view of Mr. Matthew Arnold's genius and place as a poet be correct, we shall be justified, it seems to me, in regarding the early relapse of his muse into silence without either surprise or regret. We shall not wonder that an impulse which was never strictly poetic in its character to the writing of poetry should have been soon exhausted, and we shall not deplore the reserve which he imposed upon himself from the moment when he became conscious that that impulse was spent. It is, in my opinion, an error of classification to include Mr. Arnold in the list of those poets with whom the

MATTHEW ARNOLD

critical faculty, strengthening with advancing years, has overgrown and killed the creative faculty. I am inclined to believe that the instinct of the critic—or, at any rate, of the thinker, the philosopher, the theorist and moralist on life—was of earlier development in him than that of the poet. I do not say they begot the poet, for I cannot believe them capable in themselves of begetting anything higher than a verse-maker. But I strongly suspect that, before his poetic instinct began to respond to the impressions made upon it by the world without, the bent of reflective habit had so far fixed itself as seriously to limit his freedom of selection for poetic purposes from the impressions thus presenting themselves. It is not good for a poet that he should start with a ready-made philosophy of life. It is better that he should evolve it for himself—if indeed it is necessary for him to have one—at a later stage of his career. The ascent of Parnassus can be much more hopefully attempted without any such *impedimentum* in the knapsack of the mountaineer, and the article, moreover, can always be procured on the summit.

It was in this sense that I spoke of Mr. Arnold's impulse to poetry as not being in strictness of language a poetic impulse. I was far from intending to imply that he belonged to that unhappy class of self-deceivers who cut up their philosophy of life into lines of equal or ostensibly equal syllabic length, and

occasionally, though not always, jingle the ends of them against each other. He was didactic only in the sense that his already formed philosophy of life too rigidly prescribed the channels in which his poetic sensibilities were to flow, and forbade their replenishment from any new freshets of inspiration when at last they ran dry. It was to this that I at least am disposed to attribute that theory of his with respect to the functions of the poet which has provoked so much just opposition. His pronouncement upon poetry, that it should be 'a criticism of life,' is the eminently natural deliverance of a man who, though he was born both poet and critic, seems to have almost reached maturity in the latter character before he even began to essay his powers in the former. His own poetry from first to last had been far too much of a criticism of life—too much so at least for its popularity and for the vigour and permanence of its inspiration; and the dictum I have cited partook largely of the character of one of those after-thoughts by which the 'human nature in man' is apt to persuade him that any shortcomings of which he is conscious have followed inevitably from the nature of things. There is, of course, a sense in which it is true that poetry is and must be a criticism of life, but interpreted in that sense it becomes so absolutely uninforming and unfruitful that it would be unjust to suspect Mr. Arnold of having dwelt with

such insistence on a proposition of such futility. Poetry is only a criticism of life in the indirect fashion in which every human art, or for that matter every human science, is and must be so ; and it would be just about as instructive and important to say that the execution of a song by Madame Patti is an illustration of the physical and physiological laws of vocalization. The poet must describe life—either the life within him or the life without—in order to poetize, just as the singer must breathe to sing ; but a poem is no more a critical deliverance on life than a song is a lecture on the respiratory functions. To attempt to impress any such character expressly and designedly on the poem is likely to be almost as fatal as it would be to intersperse the song with spoken observations on the structure and action of the 'vocal chords.'

This 'criticism of life' crotchet was, however, only one of a few critical perversities with which Mr. Arnold alternately amused and irritated his readers ; and on these it is not necessary to linger. It is more pleasant to dwell, as one can do, with admiration almost unqualified, on his general work as a critic of literature. Much has been said since his death of the *Essays in Criticism* as an 'epoch-making book,' and, with a little care in defining the precise nature of the epoch which it did make, the phrase may be defended. It would be too much to say that the principles

MATTHEW ARNOLD

of criticism for which Mr. Arnold contended were new and original—or rather it would be the reverse of a compliment to say so, since it is literally certain that any fundamentally novel discovery on this ancient subject would turn out another Invention of the Mare's-nest. There is no critical canon in the Essays which has not been observed in, and might not be illustrated from, the practice of some critic for long before the Essays appeared. But it is quite true that these principles were at that time undergoing what from time to time in our literary history they have frequently undergone, a phase of neglect; and it is equally true that Mr. Arnold's lucid exposition of these principles, and the singularly fascinating style of the series of papers in which he illustrated them, gave a healthy stimulus and a true direction to English literary criticism, which during the thirty years now completed since the publication of the Essays it has on the whole preserved. And to credit any writer with such an achievement as this is undoubtedly to concede his claim to a permanent place in the history of English letters.

It may be that Mr. Arnold would not have made that place higher or more assured by steadily pursuing his studies as a literary critic; but the virtual abandonment of these studies, so far at least as publication is concerned, during his later years, must always remain a matter of keen regret to all lovers of

MATTHEW ARNOLD

literature. There were so many subjects which he had touched so admirably and yet had only touched ; so many on which he had said his word, but not his last word. To take only one instance of our loss : it is now more than forty years since, in the preface to the first collected edition of his poems, he instituted his subtle and penetrating comparison between the dramatic methods of Shakespeare and of the Greek tragedians. Nothing could be more striking and suggestive, nothing more excellently put than that criticism. Yet so far from exhausting the subject, which indeed is probably inexhaustible, it seemed merely to open the way into a wide and fruitful field of critical inquiry, which no one could have explored with so sure a foot as he. Yet from this exploration, as from so much other work for which he was uniquely fitted, Mr. Arnold, for the last ten years of his life, turned almost wholly away. And he turned away from it to devote himself, save for occasional and for the most part singularly ineffectual excursions into the domain of contemporary politics, to a hopelessly unpractical and almost visionary attempt to put the old wine of dogmatic Christianity into the new bottles of modern scientific thought !

Some years ago, on the occasion of the issue of a cheap reprint of *Literature and Dogma*, I endeavoured to investigate the validity of Mr. Arnold's theories of Scriptural interpretation, and to estimate the amount

of acceptance which they were likely to obtain from those whom it was his avowed desire, and whom he so strangely conceived it to be his special mission, to instruct. On the former of these too questions I find nothing now to add to the observations which I then made. I thought then, and I still think, and, what is more, I believe it to be the well-nigh universal opinion, that the critical canons by which Mr. Arnold sought to refine away what he regarded as the materialistic accretions on the creed of Christianity, (but what are really of its essence as a definite system of doctrines deriving from a supernatural origin and possessing a supernatural sanction,) were valueless for any practical purpose. I thought, and still think, that the whole of his teachings on this subject were in part futile and in part superfluous: superfluous, because unneeded by those who have accepted with him the conclusions of modern science, and who, if they retain their belief in Christianity at all, are quite competent to devise their own 'accommodations' for themselves; and futile, because assured of rejection by those who, through ignorance of or repugnance to the scientific conclusions which are tending to destroy its supernatural element, still cling to their religion, 'superstitions' and all. The assumption that there anywhere exists any considerable class of Christians in so curiously 'mixed' a mental condition as to be at once anxious to reconcile the dogmas of their

faith with the informations of their reason, unable to do it for themselves, and willing to allow others to attempt it for them, was in itself an assumption of a highly doubtful kind ; but the idea that if there were such persons they would find anything specially persuasive in Mr. Arnold's method of reasoning with them, or even in his manner of approaching them, appears to me to have been a positively monumental instance of self-deception.

Our spiritual physician reversed the Scriptural precept, and addressed himself not to the sick, but to the whole. The style, the argument, and, above all, the illustrations of a treatise avowedly addressed to persons still in the bonds of servitude to a narrow and superstitious literalism, appeared, nevertheless, to presuppose the completest 'emancipation' on the part of its readers. The babes and sucklings who were to be weaned from their superstition were fed with the strongest of strong meats by their instructor, and that too, apparently, in perfect good faith and with no sign of any suspicion of the weakness of their stomachs. An amusing illustration of this unconsciousness is to be found in the preface to the new edition of *Literature and Dogma*, in connection with its author's astounding figure of 'the three Lord Shaftesburys.' 'Many of those,' observes Mr. Arnold, 'who have most ardently protested against the illustration, resent it, no doubt, because it directs

attention to that extreme licence of affirmation about God which prevails in our popular religion, and one is not the easier forgiven for directing attention to error because one marks it as an object for indulgence. To protesters of this sort I owe no deference, and make no concessions. But the illustration has given pain, I am told, in a quarter where only deference, and the deference of all who can appreciate one of the purest careers and noblest characters of our time, is indeed due; and, finding that in that quarter pain has been given by the illustration, I do not hesitate to expunge it.' In other words, Mr. Arnold, finding that he has given offence by comparing the Trinity to 'three Lord Shaftesburys,' apologizes—to Lord Shaftesbury. To the 'protesters,' who were certainly not thinking of Lord Shaftesbury when they resented the comparison, he thinks he 'owes no deference,' and will therefore 'make no concessions.' One is left wondering whether Mr. Arnold was really unaware of the susceptibilities and the persons he had wounded, or whether he purposely treated them with contempt. And in either case one wonders still more vehemently whether he was aware that the persons to whom he owed no deference and would make no concessions were, in fact, the very persons whom, if his teachings were to bear any fruit at all, he was bound, before all others, to conciliate. But either of the two ex-

planations will equally entitle us to say that Mr. Arnold could have formed no adequate estimate of the fundamental conditions of success in the task which he proposed to himself.

As a critic of our social life and institutions, Mr. Arnold was doubtless more successful. No one can say that his delightful raillery was altogether thrown away upon its objects. Our 'Barbarians' are probably a little less barbarous, our 'Philistines' a little more enlightened, for his pleasant satire. And those who could appreciate the temper of his literary weapon, and his matchless skill in using it, were able to watch the periodical performances for many years with almost undiminished pleasure. But it must be admitted, I think, that even as a social instructor he somewhat outstayed his welcome, and that even his most ardent admirers occasionally found their patience a little tried by him. His incessant iteration of his favourite phrases was, no doubt, a tactical expedient deliberately adopted for controversial purposes at the perceived expense of artistic effect. Mr. Arnold was well aware that to provoke, to irritate, is better for a disputant than to fail to impress, and he had no doubt persuaded himself that to get our social defects acknowledged and the proper remedies applied, it was necessary to be as importunate as the widow suitor of the unjust judge. It is true he does not tell us, in the admirable lines on Goethe which

adorn the memorial verses to Wordsworth, that that 'physician of the iron age' was *always* 'striking his finger on the place,' and saying, 'Thou ailest here and here;' but Mr. Arnold had abandoned the methods and the vehicle of the poet—who speaks once for all with a voice whose echoes are undying—before he started in business as a reformer of his countrymen's manners and modes of thought. As a prose physician, so to speak, he may have thought that his prescriptions needed to be dinned into the ears of the patient until he actually consented to try them. But a recognition of that fact only sets us inquiring what the value of the prescription is; and when we find ourselves assured that all the defects of the various classes of our society are to be corrected, and that all the unsatisfied 'claims' upon them—the 'claim of beauty,' the 'claim of manners,' and all the rest of it—are to obtain their due satisfaction through a reform of our system of secondary education, we recall the writer's official position and duties, and are irresistibly reminded of a certain homely *apologue* the point of which is contained in its concluding words, 'There's nothing like leather.' In this as in other matters we see how Mr. Arnold's persistent determination to play the constructive reformer—a part for which he had no natural aptitude—enticed him beyond the limits of that critical function in which his true strength lay.

But much as we may regret the perversity, if that be not too harsh a word, which diverted so large a portion of Mr. Arnold's intellectual energies in later years away from the natural bent of his genius, it would be ungracious not to acknowledge the indirect benefit which arose from this very dispersion of the rays of that penetrating intelligence. He could not touch any subject without throwing some light upon it. Everything that he wrote was suggestive, if too little of it was satisfying; and though his determination to avoid the commonplace view of every subject was undoubtedly a snare—since the commonplace, and even what he would have called the Philistine view, is more often the true view than he was at all prepared to admit—it was also, and as undoubtedly, in many instances a source of strength. A deliverance of Mr. Arnold's on any question—social, moral, or political, as well as literary—was always the most admirable touchstone of received opinions. None of us could be quite sure of our reason for the faith that is in us on any matter till it had stood the test of his refined and searching criticism. More of us have been compelled by him than by any other writer of our age and country to review and revise our judgments upon most subjects of human interest; and not only the world of literature, but the infinitely larger world of unexpressed thought and feeling and unembodied imagination, is sensibly the poorer for his loss.

SAMUEL RICHARDSON

AMONG all the emblems of change and reminders of mortality with which the world is full, there are few perhaps more pathetic than the faded flowers of romance literature. The picture which has ceased to please seems still to preserve a certain life of its own ; and the death of an ‘acting’ play is, after all, only like the disappearance of the companion of a few amusing or exciting hours. But the popular novel—and more especially the popular novel of emotion and sentiment—has been the close, the constant, the confidential friend of so many readers ; it has awakened so many imaginations, engrossed so many minds, and perhaps, if a work of real genius, entered into and affected so many intellectual lives, that there is something peculiarly strange and sad about its literary death. I suppose that there are few real lovers of literature who cannot, after Jaques’s fashion, ‘suck melancholy’ of this sort out of a survey of the shelves of any well-found library ; and assuredly there is no shelf more likely to yield

SAMUEL RICHARDSON

it than that which bears—very likely along its whole length—the serried line of Samuel Richardson's works. Nineteen volumes—nineteen 'mortal' volumes, as the observer of to-day is but too likely to put it—contain, in one of the best of the older editions, the three romances which complete the sum of this author's literary performances; and not a volume, he will notice, is out of its place. Not a soldier in that regiment is missing, or for years past has been missing from morning parade, though a century or more ago there would have been deserters to be found in half the rooms in the house—above stairs, and even surreptitiously perhaps below. No one in the lifetime of the oldest inmate has imitated Pamela's wicked master by disturbing her repose. Sir Charles Grandison is no more called upon to display his courtly graces in any new ceremonies of introduction. There is dust on the edges of *Clarissa Harlowe*, instead of tears upon her page.

To not a few careless critics the neglect of Richardson seems sufficiently accounted for by a gibe at his inordinate length. Yet we must learn to distinguish between *des longueurs* in one sense and *des longueurs* in another. There is a prolixity which is compatible with art, and is even an essential condition of a pure artistic form; and there is a prolixity which is of itself a fault in art, and as such always and everywhere to be condemned. To say that the

genre ennuyeux is of its own nature anathema is, from the historic point of view, to beg the question. If a man's contemporaries find him tiresome, there is an end of the matter, so far as contemporary criticism goes; but, if he is only found tiresome by posterity, the question of course arises whether it be he or posterity that is to blame. We all know that the *genre ennuyeux* of one age is often very far from having been the *genre ennuyeux* of another; and, it being once ascertained that an author was read with untiring interest by the public of his day, the fact that he is a weariness to the flesh of a later generation becomes almost irrelevant to the question of his real merit. The word 'almost' is, no doubt, a necessary qualification, because the fact last mentioned is to this extent relevant that it does unquestionably exclude such a writer from that small band of the immortals who have delighted all ages and bored none. But no romancist's *manes*—at least, no reasonable *manes* of any such departed writer—need chafe at his exclusion from so very select a circle. The question as to the number of 'classics' who neither bore nor ought to bore the reader of to-day, is one upon which I share many of Mr. James Payn's suspicions without sharing his intrepidity in specifying them. But as to the mere number of great ones of the earth who, whether rightly or not, are as a matter of fact found tedious when taken in large

doses, one can speak with more freedom perhaps ; and nothing, therefore, need hinder me from saying that Richardson in the Shades must have improved upon the quite sufficient complacency of Richardson among the living if he regards himself as too good for his company. After all, he only adds another to a group which, if at one end it is typified by the authors of *The Grave* and *The Course of Time*, includes at the other end the poets of *The Excursion* and *Paradise Lost*.

The yawns of posterity prove no more than this. They remit Richardson to the class who by reason of their matter or their manner, or both, have failed to sustain their appeal to the unflagging attention of mankind. But, from the point of view of retrospective criticism, this of course is immaterial. Except for the ambitious purpose of fixing a departed writer's place in the literature of all time, his unbounded and unabated vogue in his own day is the only fact needed in order 'to found,' as the lawyers put it, 'the jurisdiction' of the critic. This alone is enough to make any author a phenomenon to be explained and if possible analyzed by the literary student of a later day. Fleeting and capricious successes in the past may no doubt be passed by : there have been Master Bettys in literature as well as on the stage. But if an author's contemporaries, critical and uncritical, consent in admiration of his writings, if the public of

his day continue to admire these writings after their novelty has entirely disappeared, and indeed throughout his lifetime and after his death, the maxim *securus judicat orbis terrarum* may be taken to apply. We may confidently expect to find in such a writer's works an imperishable something, some breath of an immortal spirit, surviving the death and decay of its embodying forms. Whether and in what way this element reveals itself to us in Richardson is a question which for the moment I propose to defer.

A matter of more immediate interest is the examination of the dead and decayed form in which this imperishable something was contained. And here a question of much curiosity, though not very easy perhaps to determine, confronts us at the outset. How much of the form was essential to the life of these books, in the days when they possessed what may be called a corporeal, instead of, as at present, only a spiritual existence—in the days when *Clarissa Harlowe* was to thousands of Englishmen what *Waverley* was to the novel-reader of the early nineteenth century, or *Adam Bede* to the novel-reader of thirty years ago? How much of the form, on the other hand, was mere dead weight and surplusage—not helping but hindering—a thing in spite, and not in right, of which these books were impatiently awaited and eagerly read? For the hasty opinion which treats everything distasteful to the modern

reader in their form as something which the contemporary reader prized, is of course a more or less gratuitous assumption. We ourselves tolerate many things in our favourite authors which we wish away. Many of us would like Dickens better without his often forced and artificial sentiment. Still more of us would be well content—in her later books, at any rate—with less of the waterlogging ballast of George Eliot's physiologico-psychology. Our posterity, therefore, will have no right to argue from Dickens's fame that his sentiment was as generally valued as his humour, or from George Eliot's fame that her contemporaries thought as highly of her scientific acquirements as they did of her satiric insight into character, and her original gift of creative imagination. And we ourselves have equally no right to assume that what may have been deductions from the sum of Richardson's claim upon his readers were actually additions thereto. All we know for certain on the matter is, that our great-grandfathers read and delighted in certain desperately prolix novels; it is too much to assume that they delighted in the prolixity for its own sake. We are often reminded, it is true, that our great-grandfathers lived in a leisurely age; but this is an explanation which accounts rather for their capacities as readers than for their tastes. It may well be that inordinately long-winded books could only be tolerable in a leisurely

age. This, however, is equally true of long dinners, long whist, and other forms of indulgence or recreation ; and it explains merely the possibility, and not the popularity, of one particular form of slow-moving amusement. Again, the more leisurely the age the greater, we should imagine, the tendency to sleep. Yet, if there is a well-authenticated fact connected with *Clarissa Harlowe*, it is that the novel put to flight, instead of provoking, slumber. ‘Right reason,’ in short, and ‘the instinct of self-preservation in mankind,’ as Mr. Matthew Arnold would say, revolt from the hypothesis that any race of men can have preferred to have a story in which they were deeply interested related to them at excessive length. For it is to be specially remembered that the most popular of Richardson’s romances was popular in respect of its story. It was not, or not mainly, by its moral lessons, by its pictures of manners, or by its analysis of character that *Clarissa Harlowe* held the public spell-bound : it was by its plot. The ‘town’ was in a fever—a slow fever, of course, but still a fever—of excitement to know whether the infamous Lovelace would succeed in his plot, and what would be the end of the unfortunate Clarissa ; and it is not to be believed that mere diffuseness of narrative, mere expenditure of many words in relating events which might have been told in a few words, would have been found endurable, or would, in fact, have been

endured. The delay must have been in some sense or other artistic ; the prolixity must have been felt to contribute something to the artistic result, in order not to have wholly destroyed the popularity of the story. The sense in which it was artistic may, to our present conceptions of art, be well-nigh unintelligible ; the something which it contributed to the result may to us be nothing, or worse than nothing. But it is surely irrational to suppose that the exterior form of Richardson's novel—in which I include not only the mere length of the book from cover to cover, but its epistolary structure and whatever other drawbacks that structure to our present ways of thinking involves—could have seemed to its own public what it seems to us : viz., simply so much handicapping of the tale. There *must* have been some reason other than the mere amount of his spare time which compelled the eighteenth-century reader to listen so patiently to a story of which he was so devouringly anxious to hear the end ; there must have been some reason why he did not resent the author's unusual, fidgetting, and in many, though not in all, respects undramatic method of telling his story in the form of correspondence. Such is the conclusion which ought to suggest itself, on *à priori* grounds of probability, to all who have ever considered the matter with any degree of care ; and it is, I may add, a conclusion which subsequent inquiry abundantly con-

SAMUEL RICHARDSON

firms. There is a reason and a good one for Richardson's prolixity; it was in many respects the very secret of his power. But, unfortunately, it is a secret to the discovery of which there is no royal road; for it would be uncandid to give so attractive a title to the only method of ascertaining it with which I am acquainted—that, namely, of reading the romances straight through from beginning to end.

Richardson was not the first, as he will not be the last, man to discover his literary powers in the use of them. When Sterne began *Tristram Shandy* he had assuredly but little idea of the artistic lengths to which his work was destined to carry him; and though the germ of *Clarissa* may have been, and of course in a certain sense must have been, latent in *Pamela*, it was, for all that appears, as completely hidden from the author of the two works as from any of his readers. No one, it may safely be said, could have seen in the earlier book the promise of the later. When Rivington and Osborne, the book-sellers, asked him 'to write a volume of letters to suit the taste of country readers;' it was in the spirit of the moralist, and not at all in that of the artist, that he responded to the invitation. Halfway through the second volume of *Pamela*, he takes advantage of the disappearance of the heroine's father and mother from the scene—at least as the sole correspondents of their daughter—to review his work and its objects; and

we then see what are the qualities in it upon which he congratulates himself. It contains, he proudly assures us, morality, and excellent morality, for all. The fashionable libertine 'may learn from it to prefer vice to virtue; the proud and high-born may see 'the deformity of unreasonable passion; ' 'good clergymen' will perceive from it that if they do their duty in despite of their 'proud patrons,' Providence will at last reward their piety; the poor will learn that 'Providence never fails to reward their honesty and integrity; ' while the virtues inculcated by the example of the heroine herself require for their examination a complete inventory divided into separate paragraphs. There is an encouraging moral for the 'poor deluded female' who has the strength of mind to 'stop at her first fault,' and a warning moral for her who pursues 'the wicked courses into which she was at first inadvertently drawn.' There are even lessons for 'the upper servants of great families' in the behaviour of three of the characters, and for the 'lower servants' of the same families in that of a fourth. In short, we are as good as told that the merit of the book is to be measured by the closeness of its resemblance to the didactics of the nursery. Nobody who reads it, says Richardson in effect, can afterwards plead ignorance of what happened to 'Don't Care.' If he remains incorrigible in his naughtiness, and comes to a bad end in consequence, he will have

himself alone to blame for it; the author of *Pamela* has at least done his best to reclaim him. He has said to him in many volumes, 'Be good, for the good are always rewarded in this life; do not be wicked, for the wicked are always punished here as well as hereafter.' What more could he do?

That the facts of life decline to confirm this comfortable gospel was apparently no more an objection from Richardson's point of view than it is from that of the nurse; but to say this is, of course, enough to dispose of the artistic claims of the book. The good sometimes prosper of course in this life; but you cannot write a story in which they are always, and all of them, to prosper, without constantly offending against truth and probability. Add to this, that the continual effort to find illustrations of morality everywhere, and to make the fortunes of all the characters in a novel subserve a didactic end is pretty sure to end in throwing some of those characters into violent contradiction with themselves. This is notably exemplified in the case of Pamela's master, whose sudden conversion from a most uncompromising profligate into a consistent paragon of propriety—for we need not attach serious importance to the Platonic flirtation with the countess in his later married life—is hardly attempted to be made credible. These, however, though the most obvious, are far from being the only artistic faults of *Pamela*. It is

hardly too much to say that it scarcely rises, in the working out of its plot any more than in its main conception, above the level of the nursery story. A romance of greater posthumous popularity has indirectly preserved the name of Pamela Andrews from oblivion, and few perhaps, even of those who have never opened a volume of Richardson, will need to be told that Pamela is a virtuous maid-servant (as her brother Joseph was a virtuous footman), who successfully resists a series of the most determined, and at last even violent, attempts upon her virtue on the part of her master, and who, at last, so impresses him by her courage and constancy that he marries her, and, with the exception of one passing cloud of jealousy, 'they live happily ever afterwards.' In such a story, with such a conclusion, there is nothing essentially ludicrous; it was reserved for Fielding to perceive by the instantaneous light of humour that it might be made exquisitely ludicrous by merely transposing the sexes of the tempter and the tempted. Why this should be so is a point in the psychology of ethics which does not immediately yield up its explanation; but the fact is unquestionable, as the reader may satisfy himself by comparing the famous scene between Joseph Andrews and Lady Booby with any of the scenes between Pamela and Mr. B. To speak the honest truth, however, it would have been difficult for Fielding to outdo Richardson in

absurdity; and Joseph Andrews, as we all know, though commenced as a caricature of *Pamela*, departed very soon, and very widely, from the lines of its model.

But, while the story of *Pamela* suffers as a story from the slowness of movement which, in a less degree (though the slowness is even greater), injures that of Clarissa, the former heroine, unlike the latter, is herself as severe a sufferer as a heroine from the delay. Her figure, to begin with, is one which will not stand much de-romanticizing. Mrs. Pamela's virtue, though no doubt quite sincere and genuine, is (as of course it should be) of a very soubrettish type, exceedingly, not to say pharisaically, self-conscious, not refined or elevated by the slightest admixture of delicacy, and obviously associated with a very shrewd eye to the main chance. All this, of course, is true enough to Nature; but truth to Nature becomes useless unless it falls into the impartial hands of Art.

These human touches in Pamela's character would have been invaluable to Richardson if he had cared to treat his heroine like an artist; but he wanted to treat her exclusively as a moralist. Her affinities with the waiting-maid of real life make her a more real and, therefore, a more interesting, if less heroic, figure; but Richardson, in order to make his moral lesson as impressive as possible, was in pursuit not

of the interesting so much as the heroic. He wanted an ideal waiting-maid, and not a real one, for his purpose; and these marks of very commonplace, and even rather vulgar, realism only serve therefore to make the ideal figure, on its lofty moral pedestal, a little ridiculous. Above all, they combine with the inartistic slowness of movement in the story, and its weak invention of incident, to destroy a great part of the reader's sympathy with the heroine, and even to suggest the suspicion, which Richardson undoubtedly never intended to arouse, that she is a person of rather a designing disposition.

‘How is this?’ the reader feels tempted to ask. ‘Here is a young woman who is evidently perfectly well able to take care of herself, and who remains, under circumstances of the most dangerous character for her chastity, exposed to the constant solicitations and even assaults of her master. Of course we are given to understand that she is under physical duress; but as a matter of fact the restraint is very often of the feeblest and most inefficient kind. On one occasion Pamela, by her own admission, might have walked straight out of the house and away, and was only restrained from doing so by the fact that there was a bull (who had injured the cook-maid under circumstances unstated) in a paddock which she would have to cross to make her escape. On another occasion there is absolutely no impediment

to her flight, and though she is indeed followed and seized in the act of getting over a stile which alone divides her from liberty, the unexplained deliberation of her movements is solely accountable for her capture.' In short, upon a careful review of the whole circumstances, the reader finds it hard to avoid the suspicion that it is calculation, and not timidity, which keeps Pamela a prisoner; that she sees a chance of inducing the infatuated Mr. B. to marry her, and that gambling for a stake so high she is prepared to make some very dangerous ventures indeed.

This idea was of course very far from Richardson's intention to suggest, and it is a fault in his characterization and story-telling that the reader feels persuaded that it is just the idea which would possess all but the exceptionally charitable spectators of Pamela's trials in actual life. But there is also little merit in the delineation of the other characters in the story. Lady Da~~vers~~vers, with whom most care has apparently been taken, is a coarsely and crudely executed portrait; and there is a want of reality about both the good Mrs. Jervis and the infamous Mrs. Jewkes. Mr. B.'s return to virtue, again, is celebrated with an exaggeration which was due in part to Richardson's *bourgeois* reverence for 'the quality,' a characteristic which sometimes amusingly, and sometimes irritatingly, deranges both the balance of

his ethical judgment and his sense of artistic propriety. In the case of Mr. B. it is most comically displayed. It is quite obviously felt by all the characters in the story, and by the author himself, that repentance is very condescending on the part of a 'gentleman of good estate'; and that with a 'place' in two counties, the ambition to secure a third in heaven is highly creditable to an English squire. Mr. B. is greatly praised for having abandoned a course of profligacy which most other men of equal rank and fortune, we are given to understand, would have pursued consistently throughout life; and those who surround him are unwearied in their laudations of his new-found virtue. No doubt the accumulation of all these honours on the repentant libertine's head is due not wholly to social servility, but in part to moral purpose; but for the merits of the romance from this point of view there is not much to be said. Coleridge, who speaks on such a point with even more than his wonted critical authority, has expressed his opinion on a comparison between *Joseph Andrews* and *Pamela* that the former is the more moral work of the two. It would be difficult, I think, for any candid modern reader of the two romances to contest this judgment. Excellent as Richardson's intentions were both towards servant-maids and country squires in composing the story, it seems to me quite certain that a careful and sympathetic study of it would, in the vast

majority of cases, prove most unedifying to either.

Clarissa Harlowe has more pretensions to plot, in the sense of invented incident and situation, than *Pamela*; but its central motive is of a no less simple kind. It is, in fact, the story of *Pamela* reversed. *Pamela*'s alternative title is *Virtue Rewarded*, and virtue in *Clarissa Harlowe* is not, except in the spiritual sense, rewarded, but defeated, outwitted, betrayed. The virtuous heroine is not permitted, as in the earlier romance, to escape the wiles of the seducer, and reap the moral reward of her firmness in his conversion to the paths of virtue, and its material recompense in a splendid establishment and a coach-and-six. On the contrary, she is condemned to fall a victim to his vile machinations, and, proudly rejecting all his offers of atonement, to sink broken-hearted into an early grave. The superior dramatic possibilities of this story compared with that of *Pamela* are evident, and Richardson owed much to their stimulus. They brought out his powers as an artist by compelling him in a great measure to drop the rôle of the moralist. He was as anxious to preach as ever; but the exigencies of his narrative do not permit him to ascend the pulpit so often, or to remain there so long. 'Be virtuous and you will be happy,' is in a certain sense the preacher's text in both cases; but in *Clarissa* the virtuous have to wear their happiness 'with a difference' which it is difficult to

explain without frequently descending the pulpit-stairs. Happiness in *Clarissa* has to do without its coach-and-six and its splendid establishment; nay, it has to part company, one by one, with all the external conditions of human well-being—home, parents, family, friends, material comforts, reputation, and, finally, life itself; and yet, in the strength of a pure heart and a quiet conscience, to maintain itself unconquered to the end. This demands a far more difficult and subtle exposition of the be-virtuous-and-you-will-be-happy text than it receives or needs in *Pamela*; and it is one which the moralist requires the artist's assistance to enforce. Anybody can see why Pamela should be happy; her contentment is as comprehensible to the simplest reader as was virtue upon five thousand pounds a-year to Becky Sharp. But Clarissa's happiness under her misfortunes is not to be taken on trust from the pulpit, or to be made credible to the congregation by even the most earnest thumping of the velvet cushion. It lies deeper than the superficial blessedness of Pamela, and the preacher must go deeper to find it for us and to show it to us. It is an inward peace of the heart, and to exhibit it the heart must be laid bare. In other words, the romancist must here cease to preach, and begin to dissect. He must desist from mere reiteration in various forms of pulpit rhetoric that virtue alone is true happiness, and attempt to convince us of the

fact by furnishing us with the explanation. He must endeavour, by minute analysis of his hapless-happy heroine's emotions, to show us that they are the natural outcome of causes whose presence and potency in the minds of human beings our own moral consciousness will attest.

It would, of course, be far too much to say that Richardson is uniformly successful in the endeavour. Neither his genius nor his method were fitted for the achievement of such uniform success. Being before all things a preacher of morals, he cannot refrain from making his characters preach to us in their own persons, when they should be simply revealing to us their own thoughts and feelings, and leaving us to draw the moral for ourselves. And while the bent of Richardson's genius thus militates against his complete artistic success, the peculiar vices of his method exercise an even more injurious effect upon his work. His letter-writers are so terribly long-winded, so mercilessly prolix, that they cannot be expected to confine themselves solely to their proper work of self-disclosure and self-portraiture. Like garrulous witnesses, they favour their jury of readers with a vast amount of matter which is in no sense evidence. When Clarissa, for example, should be telling us minutely what she feels, and *specifically* why she feels it, she is continually lapsing into mere general allegations that her mind is at peace, with the addition

of the pulpit platitude that the minds of the virtuous always are. The thing is so, she tells us, because it must be so. But in any well-conducted trial of the issue, Does virtue insure happiness, ay or no? Miss Harlowe would have found herself being perpetually 'stopped by the Court.' She may say, 'I feel happy,' and that is evidence as far as it goes, though it does not go far. She may add: 'I feel proud of my fortitude and of my superiority to my betrayer,—conscious that the outrage inflicted upon my body has left my soul unsullied—awed and impressed by perceiving that the victor is more abashed and perturbed by his triumph than I, the vanquished, by my defeat; and it is in the sum of these emotions (which obviously only the virtuous could feel) that my happiness consists.' All that is evidence, too, and of a very important kind. But when the witness persists in repeating the formula, 'I am happy because I am virtuous,' the presiding judge would be bound to check her with the polite but firm correction, 'That, madam, is for the jury. It is for them to decide whether your happiness is the result of virtue, or of conceit, callousness, insanity, I know not what.' But, though Clarissa is undoubtedly too apt to encroach in this manner on the jurisdiction of the reader, it must be admitted that she makes out her case at last to his complete satisfaction. We end by believing as thoroughly in her happiness as in her virtue, and by feeling that it fully

responds to our own conceptions of the natural and the true.

She starts, however, with considerable personal advantages over Pamela. She is altogether a more sympathetic and attractive figure, to begin with, simpler and more refined, of a higher dignity and delicacy, of a far more unconscious purity—a ‘lady’ by nature, in fact, which ‘Mrs. Pamela’ neither is nor of course was intended to be, nor could, without injury to the story, have been made. And Clarissa also is morally of a far more sincere and genuine stuff than her predecessor in fiction. Both, to be sure, are prigs: they have to be made so, in order that they may deliver Richardson’s moral reflections in Richardson’s language. But Clarissa, far more often than Pamela, takes the pen from Richardson’s hand, and writes, not what the preacher would have her utter, but what it is given her to utter out of the deepest depths of a human heart. We get to recognize in her case, as we never do in that of the self-conscious waiting-maid, that she is seldom, if ever, a prig on her own account. We learn to regard her in a double aspect, and mentally to dissociate the living, breathing, suffering woman from the mere mouth-piece of moral commonplaces. But, as the story draws towards its tragic close, the need of any such mental act of dissociation less frequently occurs. We have more and more of the natural woman and

less and less of the sermonizing automaton, more and more of Clarissa Harlowe and less and less of Clarissa Richardson. The presence of her creator's hand is still, indeed, too plainly perceived ; the faults of his method still too intrusively assert themselves. The 'linked sweetness' of the tale of woe is decidedly too 'long drawn out ;' the sorrows of the death-stricken heroine are dwelt upon and elaborated beyond all measure, and their portrayal is marred in one instance—that of her preparation of her coffin—by an artistic blunder of a truly lamentable kind. But by many a touch of authentic human pathos, of true womanly gentleness and heroism, the figure of the slowly dying maiden—*παρθένος ἀπάρθενος*—wins its way to our hearts ; and though time and change may have decreed that it shall never again so deeply stir the emotions of mankind as it once was wont to stir them, yet we shall, I think, even the coldest of us, find sufficient excuse for the freely flowing tears of a past generation in the moistened eyes of our own.

Still it would be scarcely true to say that the power of the romance over our sympathies is wholly or perhaps even mainly due to the isolated realisation of the heroine. It is largely by force of contrast that the individuality and the career of Clarissa are made impressive. She owes much, very much, to her foil in the person of Lovelace. He is her making in the novel, as in life he was her undoing ; and even if the

victim were a far less winning and sympathetic figure than she is, she would derive a sufficiency of reflected interest from her association with a character which has been set before us with such masterly vigour of portraiture as Richardson has bestowed upon the lineaments of her betrayer. But before entering upon the analysis of this, so immeasurably the highest, achievement of the author's genius, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the plot of this once famous story.

Clarissa Harlowe is the daughter of an English country gentleman of good fortune and repute, but of a cold, hard, despotic temperament, a man not altogether destitute, perhaps, of paternal affection, but possessed with the most extravagant notions—extravagant, surely, even for those days—of the rights of paternal authority. His wife is a kind-hearted and affectionate, but contemptibly weak and submissive, woman, too fond of her daughter to join without remorse in oppressing her, and too much afraid of her husband to make any effective protest against it. The couple, in short, form a pretty exact 'replica' of the father and mother of the heroine of *Aylmer's Field*. Add to these a surly, ill-conditioned brother, and an envious and spiteful sister, the willing accomplices of the parental design against Clarissa's peace, together with two uncles, the indifferent spectators of its execution, and the domestic circle

is complete. Circumstances combine with the characters of Clarissa's family to prepare her unhappy fate. Her grandfather has earned for her the ill-will of her kindred by passing over them in his will, and constituting her the heiress of a small property which would have made her independent of them, but of which, from exaggerated notions of filial respect, she declines to take possession except with the willing assent of her parents. Her sister, Arabella, bears a special grudge against her as the involuntarily successful rival, to whom Lovelace, for a time the pretended suitor of Arabella, had always meant to transfer, and at the beginning of the story does in fact transfer, his addresses. These conditions given, we manifestly need nothing more than the appearance on the scene of a suitor whom Clarissa detests, and whom her father is resolved to force upon her, in order to establish the groundwork of the domestic tragedy which is to follow. Profound as is Clarissa's filial piety, it is unequal to the sacrifice which her parents demand of her. She persists in her rejection of the odious De Solmes, although the harshest measures are resorted to by her father to compel her submission. She is degraded from her position as housekeeper to the family; her keys are taken away from her; she is confined to her room a close prisoner; and a tender-hearted maid-servant, who had assisted her mistress to maintain a clandestine corre-

spondence with the only female friend she possesses, having been detected and dismissed, she is for a time cut off from all communication with the outer world. Lovelace, however, finds means of reopening a correspondence with her; and, as her persecutions verge upon the intolerable, his solicitations naturally approach the irresistible. Driven at last to desperation by the near approach of the day fixed for the detested marriage, Clarissa agrees to accept Lovelace's pretended offer of escort to the house of one of his female relatives, who he had declared would give her refuge. With this one false step begins that series of misfortunes and indignities to which the unhappy girl at last succumbs. Lovelace's promise was, of course, a mere trick to get Clarissa into his power. Instead of taking her to her supposed destination, he conveys her to the house of a certain infamous Mrs. Sinclair, where she remains at first willingly and in ignorance of the character of the place, afterwards under duress. She once makes her escape, but only to be followed and recaptured; and at last the crime which her villainous lover has striven with such merciless determination to commit is, by force, accomplished. His triumph, however, is fatal alike to his victim and to himself. Smitten with remorse, or with as near an approach to that emotion as his nature is capable of feeling, Clarissa's betrayer entreats her to forgive him and become his

SAMUEL RICHARDSON

wife ; but it is then too late. She too deeply 'despises the wretch who could rob himself of his wife's virtue,' and as soon as she is freed from her captivity she secludes herself altogether from the world. But her sufferings have broken her heart, and she pines slowly away and dies, unreconciled to her family, and attended in her last moments only by a repentant friend of Lovelace's, John Belford, and her cousin, Colonel Morden, by whose hand her betrayer ultimately falls.

The imperfections of this story are plain enough upon its face, and they are made yet more conspicuous by the manner of its telling. To begin with, the plot is exposed to the capital objection that, while it professes to be thoroughly realistic, it is from the point of view of real life preposterous. It is not so much an improbable as an impossible one ; the sufferings of Clarissa are as those of an imprisoned princess in a fairy-tale ; the cruelty and power of Lovelace is as that of the giant or ogre of the same order of fable. Young 'bloods' may have been very masterful and daring in mid-eighteenth century ; wrongful acts may have been less easily and quickly brought to light in those days than in these of the penny press ; wealth and wickedness may have been less hopelessly overmatched in a contest with the law than they are now. But, after all, the liberty of the subject could not have been quite so

much at the mercy even of an equally determined and far more ingenious plotter than Lovelace, as was Clarissa's. Even for women of humbler rank, the law was not of a presence so inaccessible as it seems to be in this romance: even for them there were courts and attorneys, and a Habeas Corpus Act; but that Miss Harlowe, a 'person of condition,' a young lady well known in the county society among which she lived, with at least one fast friend in Miss Howe, and through her a male ally in Mr. Hickman, should have remained so long a helpless captive, is simply incredible. Her gaoler, it is to be observed, takes no pains to conceal himself from the world. He moves freely enough in society during the progress of his vile conspiracy; and Richardson even invents the monstrous incident of his meeting and conversing (in no very amiable spirit, it is true,) with the very family of his victim at the house of a common friend. The notion of his going about for weeks and months in this way unmolested, is surely too gross an excess of a realistic romancer's privileges of invention. It is perfectly certain that in real life a piece of paper would have been very promptly handed to this all-subduing gentleman, on which he would have found 'Robert Lovelace' commanded by George II. to 'have in our Court before us at Westminster immediately on receipt of this our writ, the body of Clarissa Harlowe

being detained under your custody, with the day and cause of her being taken and detained.' This, however, is of course the least of the consequences with which Clarissa's persecutor would have been threatened. Lovelace, as Mr. Leslie Stephen has pointed out, 'has every conceivable motive, including the desire to avoid hanging,' for wishing to obtain his victim's forgiveness. He had, in fact, been guilty of a capital crime, and, what is more, against no obscure and powerless person. Indeed, it is more than probable that in actual life both 'Captain' Lovelace and his lieutenants, Mowbray, De Tourville, and the other scoundrels would have swung together on Tyburn tree.

There is another improbability, however, in the story, besides that of plot; there is in the realistic sense of the word an improbability of character also in the person of Lovelace. Considered as a serious picture of the fashionable libertine, the thoroughly abandoned 'fine gentleman' of his day, the character is, of course, a monstrosity. The truth is that Richardson had as little actual knowledge of the class whom he thus caricatured, as the modern lady novelist has of the dear, delightful, wicked Guardsman, whose prowess in the fields of love and war she similarly exaggerates. Men are of course aware that no flesh-and-blood officer of the Household Brigade is at once so profligate, so strong, so hand-

some, so daring a rider to hounds, so masterly a whist-player, and the wearer of such costly dressing-gowns, as are the irresistible heroes of the lady's novel; and many of Richardson's contemporaries must doubtless have felt the same about Lovelace. The quiet little bookseller evidently took a sort of trembling, delicious pleasure in the elaboration and contemplation of the superhuman wickedness of his fine gentleman. His heartlessness, his cynicism, his brutality and audacity, are individually worked up to an almost incredible pitch, and are quite incredible in combination. We may be perfectly assured, and may congratulate human nature on the assurance, that no such man as Lovelace ever existed. But this is no objection to the story from the imaginative point of view. It is not less certain, I should think, that no such man as Iago ever existed; considered from the point of view of actuality, we cannot accept him as a faithful picture of an 'ancient' in the Venetian army. But Iago, though beyond the range of the actual, is a masterpiece of imaginative truth, and so, and in a scarcely less degree, is Lovelace. The reason why the 'monster,' 'faultless' or the reverse, of the inferior artist offends us is, not because his vices and virtues are idealized to excess, but because they do not seem to be the vices and virtues of humanity at all. It is not that they shock us *in degree*, but that we do not recognize them *in kind*. It

is far otherwise, however, with Richardson's Lovelace. Villain as he is, we see how he has become so, and we perceive that it has been through the morbid hypertrophy of very common, and in most men very venial, foibles. Hardly an act of treachery, however black, or of cruelty, however brutal, is wrought by him ; hardly a sally of diabolical cynicism, or a cry of heartless triumph escapes him, which cannot be traced to the simple passion of egotism, in one or other of its two forms of selfishness and vanity. His attractive and repulsive qualities are all of a piece, and are all woven of the stuff of his self-love. His good-humour, his gaiety, his *savoir faire*, his fascination even for the people who dislike him, are all born of his desire to gratify himself ; while, on the other hand, we see that his egotism is doubly the parent of his crimes, in prompting him to their commission, and in partially blinding him, cynic though he is, to their full enormity. There is an admirable subtlety in the way in which Richardson shows the secret workings of Lovelace's ever-active selfishness and his unsleeping vanity, even in his momentary outbursts of remorse. His letters are full of touches of perfectly natural, yet perfectly unconscious, self-disclosure ; and from end to end, in fact, his imaginative reality, to use a phrase which is only apparently self-contradictory, is consistently and most skilfully sustained.

It would be allowing too much, however, to the third of Richardson's romances, *Sir Charles Grandison*, to say that it reaches the same level of ideal portraiture as *Clarissa Harlowe*. In delineating, at the request of his friends, as he tells us, 'the man of true honour,' in the person of this irreproachable baronet, Richardson had no such dramatic contrast to inspire him as in his second and greatest romance. Sir Hargrave Pollexfen is but a commonplace and vulgar foil to the virtues of the hero, and there is no thread of pathos or of tragedy running through the story, or indeed appearing in it, except episodically, to give play to the author's strongest powers. Sir Charles Grandison shows himself a man of true honour, in eight volumes; and that is about all that can be said of the romance. Unlike *Clarissa*, its narrative cannot be said to hang fire through the diffuseness of the narrator's method; for in strictness of language it contains no narrative at all. 'Why, sir,' once exclaimed Dr. Johnson, 'if you were to read Richardson for the story, you would hang yourself;' and *Sir Charles Grandison*, far more avowedly than its predecessors, dispenses with plot and relies upon the analysis and exhibition of character alone. But it illustrates, though in a less degree than *Clarissa Harlowe*, the points insisted upon at the outset of these remarks. The diligent reader of either, and especially of *Clarissa*, can hardly fail to be enlight-

ened as to the true import and value of Richardson's relentless prolixity. He will no longer suppose it to be a mere accident of the author's literary manner or mental constitution. His public may have only tolerated it out of regard for certain other qualities of Richardson's which were not to be enjoyed except in its company; but unconsciously they profited by it. The faithful but exhausted reader, as he closes one of these long-drawn romances, and reflects upon it, will undoubtedly be forced to acknowledge that their length is of their essence; that, extraordinarily diffuse as they are, they contain comparatively little matter which could be fairly rejected as surplusage, and that Richardson and his art being what they were, his romances would not have been the better, but the worse, for any abridgment of their length. This is not to say, of course, that the art is of the highest kind. Undoubtedly there would be higher creative genius and greater delineative skill in achieving, by half a dozen masterly touches, what Richardson only contrives to accomplish by the patient multiplications of thousands of minute strokes. But to only a few of the great creators and great literary craftsmen of the world has it been given to produce great work by the former method; and it would be irrational to complain of any lesser artist that he possesses it not. It is only when a Diderot's extravagance forces us to the comparison that we

SAMUEL RICHARDSON

need remind ourselves or others that Richardson is not Shakespeare. At other times it should be enough for us that he uses his own literary instruments to the best advantage, and gets the utmost out of his method that it will yield; and no one, I think, who steadily and manfully submits himself to a course of Richardson will question that he does. He has no 'moments,' as the slang of dramatic criticism has it; there are no flashes of inspiration in his work; no sudden and happy strokes of descriptive genius which seem to do the work of a chapter in a line. There is hardly any sensible exertion of power, and at any given instant no visible growth of result. But by dint of sheer iteration, he succeeds in producing the effect he desires.

'Gutta cavat lapidem non vi sed saepe cadendo.'

And though the drip-drip of that interminable correspondence is to some men soporific, to others maddening and tedious, it must be admitted, to all the reader will nevertheless find, when the drops have at last ceased to fall, that they have channelled sharp and deep impressions on the tablet of the mind.

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

IN one of the most curious discussions which ever escaped being brought to an untimely close by a request for definitions, Dr. Johnson in his usual oracular fashion observed: 'Sir, there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners, and *there* is the difference between the characters of Richardson and those of Fielding. Characters of manners are very entertaining, but they are to be understood by a more superficial observer than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart.' By way of further illustrating his meaning the doctor went on to remark that there was as great a difference between these two writers as between 'a man who knew how a watch was made and a man who could tell the hour by looking on a dial-plate.' The analogy, though not at all expressive of the real distinction between the two great masters, and though it seems at first sight even unfair to the in-

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

ferior of the two forms of art thus compared with each other, will be seen on a closer view to be marked by Johnson's customary felicity of comparison. Undoubtedly there is a way of studying men and women which exactly resembles a reading of the hour on the dial-plate of a watch, and another way of studying them which bears as exact a resemblance to an examination of its works.

But Boswell, in remarking by way of reply that 'the neat watches of Fielding are as well constructed as the large clocks of Richardson,' and that 'his dial-plates are brighter,' was talking more than usually off the matter. His true answer to his 'venerable friend' would have been first to have disputed the soundness of the distinction between Richardson's and Fielding's characters as 'characters of nature' and 'characters of manners'; secondly, to have denied that the two forms of characterisation need be, or in the highest art could be, mutually exclusive; and, thirdly, to point out that the question for the critic is not how much a novelist *knows* about human nature, but how much of it, and with what accompaniments of artistic charm and intellectual interest, he succeeds in exhibiting to his readers. A character of manners which is not also a character of nature becomes a study of superficial eccentricities; a character of nature which is not also, at least to some extent, a character of manners, becomes a piece of

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

bare psychological analysis. The one is not high art; the other is not art at all, but science, or quasi-science.

Of course the aim both of Richardson and Fielding—and, whenever they are at their best, their attained aim—is the exhibition of human nature; and the latter no more forgets this aim in his descriptions of manners than the former attempts to dispense entirely with descriptions of manners in his constant effort towards that aim. As to ‘diving into the recesses of the human heart,’ both of the two men have done that, as every man must before he can tell other people what is to be found there. The difference between them is a mere question of method. Richardson will not, or cannot, give you much information as to what is to be found in the human heart without compelling you to join him yourself in the diving process; Fielding allows you to remain on the surface while directing your imagination unerringly to what lies beneath. Which of the two methods implies the more artistic skill, and gives the more artistic pleasure, is a question which I should think is hardly open to doubt.

In the matter of truth of portraiture and vividness of representation, the two methods, no doubt, occupy more equal ground; but, even here, the analytic has certainly no advantage over the dramatic method. Nothing, surely, but Johnson’s invincible prejudice

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

against Fielding could have persuaded him that Lovelace is a more real and living character to us, a more thoroughly comprehended and appreciated individuality, than Tom Jones, or Clarissa Harlowe than Amelia Booth, or Sir Charles Grandison than Squire Western. The two last-mentioned characters stand at the two opposite poles in the matter of manners ; and considering how strongly marked, in their own way, are the manners of each of them, their creators might alike have left them to tell their own story to the reader. True to his method, however, Richardson is perpetually 'diving into the recesses' of Sir Charles's heart. Hundreds of pages are filled with minute accounts of what other people think of him, and a good many score with indications, direct or indirect, of what he thinks of himself. But compare the effect of all these laborious efforts to complete and define our conception of the baronet with the enlightenment of a single dramatic stroke of self-disclosure on the part of the squire. 'I don't know how 'tis, but, Allworthy, you always make me do just as you please ; and yet I have as good an estate as you, and am in the commission of the peace just as yourself.' What is the illuminating power of all Richardson's thousands of carefully arranged candles to that of this one penetrating electric flash ? But it is hardly fair, perhaps, to take such an example. Humour is the only generator of this sort of electricity ; and

Fielding was as consummately skilled in the production and storage of that force as Richardson was utterly incapable not merely of directing its action but even of comprehending its properties.

The essential unsoundness of Johnson's distinction is, however, too obvious to us in these days to need insisting on; nor, by consequence, is there any necessity for asserting the essential unity, as regards aim and criterion, of all fictive art under whatever forms. What was unperceived by this robust and well-equipped critic of a hundred years ago has become a commonplace in these days to men who do not aspire to be called critics at all. The effort of every novelist, and the demand of all but indiscriminately voracious novel readers, is for as true and complete a representation of human nature as the insight and skill of the novelist enable him to compass. Whether his characters be 'characters of manners' or not, he endeavours to make them and his public resent the failure if he fails to make them 'characters of nature' also. So thoroughly, indeed, is this taken for granted, that no novelist for whom his admirers claim a place in the first rank would for a moment be admitted by them to be only a portrayer, however faithful and humorous, of mere 'manners' in Johnson's sense of the word—that is to say, if merely the more strongly marked, superficial characteristics, moral and intellectual, of men and women—of their

'humours,' as they were called by an earlier Jonson and his contemporaries.

To take an example. Just as there were Pelagians and semi-Pelagians, so there are Dickensians and semi-Dickensians, who, while thoroughly united in their admiration of that master's portraiture of 'manners,' part company altogether in their estimate of its relation to nature. But the true Dickensian regards this last point as 'the root of the matter.' He would think his own creed not worth holding if he made any concession to the theory that Dickens was only a divine caricaturist, whose personages, or the more successful among them, are simply insulated oddities or personified foibles. A belief in their correspondence to some objective reality in nature is his *signum stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae*: and this, indeed, is the criterion which is nowadays universally applied—at any rate to every novel whose writers and readers claim for it any place of importance as a work of art. The demand, in fact, for strict fidelity to nature has become so imperious that it is at last producing something like a revolt against the dramatic method of Fielding, so long predominant in English literature, and a reaction in favour of the analytic method of Richardson.

We have nowadays an increasing school of novelists, who are so afraid of being suspected of confining themselves to the delineation of the mere ex-

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

ternals of character, that they will hardly give us any externals of character at all. Their men and women are almost disembodied emotions, which the reader is invited to study, not as they objectify themselves in incident or action—for of incident and action there is almost none—but subjectively and from the inside. The heroes and heroines of Mr. Howells and Mr. Henry James do not indeed, like those of Richardson, describe or have described for them, in interminable letters, their subtlest shades of feeling; but their creators do it for them, and with a minute delicacy which Richardson himself has not surpassed. Decidedly we have, under the guidance of the American school of novelist, travelled far enough from Fielding's conception of the novel, as a stage on which character might be left to enfold itself in action and dialogue, with as little assistance as possible from the soliloquies of the chorus. In our modern novel of analysis Chorus is more often on the stage, and for longer periods together than any of the actors.

This reaction, however, is of very modern origin. For a full century after Johnson delivered the above-quoted criticism the method of Fielding enjoyed so complete a triumph over the rival method of Richardson—the objective and synthetic school succeeded in beating the subjective and analytic school so utterly out of the field, that even the distinction so dogmatically propounded by Johnson to Boswell

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

would, to the ordinary modern reader, be unintelligible. To-day it requires reflection and study of its context to ascertain its meaning. What Johnson meant by 'manners' is to the modern reader so indispensable an incident of 'character,' and so common an index to nature, that he does not readily apprehend what is meant by opposing 'characters of nature' to 'characters of manners.' Every portrayal of human nature in fiction must be, it seems to him, a portrayal of manners, in Johnson's wide sense of the word—that is to say, a delineation of those individual peculiarities of conduct, speech, and action whereby the inner nature of a man is revealed to his fellows. Long familiarity with this method of portraiture, and a blessed ignorance of its opposite, has persuaded the ordinary modern reader that it is the only one possible in the nature of things. He has never pored hour by hour over Richardson's laborious engravery, and watched that great but exasperating artist portraying 'nature' after his relentless fashion; with almost no assistance from the exhibition of anything which can in the loosest acceptation of the word be called 'manners,' but simply working away with his amazing complacency at 'how he felt,' 'how she felt,' 'what he thought,' 'what she thought,' until, little stroke by stroke, he has traced out for us a human soul.

The ordinary modern novel-reader knows nothing,

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

I say, of all this; and though I yield to no one in admiration of Richardson—though I would say ditto, in fact, to almost any praise of him which keeps short of the extravagance of Diderot's—I could not, in common humanity, recommend the ordinary modern novel-reader to exchange an ignorance which, if not bliss, is contentment, for a wisdom which, if not folly, is fatigue. Knowing nothing, however, by painful experience, of Johnson's novel of 'nature,' he so confidently regards Johnson's novel of 'manners' as the only possible novel that he has virtually dropped, and forgotten the ancient meaning of the qualifying suffix; and, if anyone should now speak to him of the novel of manners, he would understand the phrase in the later and more limited sense in which it is employed at the head of this article. He would take it, no doubt, as equivalent to the 'novel of society,' at least as that last word was understood before it underwent that process of fashionable vulgarisation which has made it a fellow-sufferer with the word 'gentleman.'

The novel of society, or the novel of manners, he would say, is the novel which professes to present only a picture of life as it appears to the student of a more or less restricted circle of men and women, and to portray human nature only as it displays itself under those limiting conditions. Now no such limitations were imposed, it is obvious to remark, either

by Fielding or by Richardson on their respective exercise of their art. Jones and Andrews move freely among all sorts of company, and Fielding delineates nature as he conceives it on every level of the social scale. The unhappy Clarissa is brought into contact with many other sorts of people than fine gentlemen and ladies ; the virtuous Pamela has to do with housekeepers and lackeys as well as with amorous squires. Society as such, the ways and characteristics, the virtues, vices, and humours of a world of actual or nominal equals, bound together by certain more or less elastic, but still perfectly definite and well-understood, conventions, may be regarded as still untrodden ground to the novelist after Fielding and Richardson had ceased to write.

By the comic dramatists of the Restoration, indeed, and by one inimitable poetic satirist of the age of Anne, 'society' had been brilliantly depicted, and between 1775 and 1780 the comedies of the *Rivals* and the *School for Scandal* had signalled the rise of a kindlier Congreve and a more masterly stage-limner than Vanbrugh. But no novelist had as yet held up the mirror to nature as she appeared at the drum and the rout, amid the fops and coquettes, the dowagers and *débutantes* of the polite world. Or rather, since universal propositions are dangerous, let us say that down to the last quarter of the eighteenth century no mirror held up by the hand of

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

any novelist had as yet presented a reflection sufficiently clear and truthful to arrest the public gaze. The fame of that achievement was reserved for a London music-master's daughter, who, in the year 1778 and at the age of six-and-twenty, set all London in a buzz of curiosity and admiration by the production of the novel of *Evelina*.

There are two things which a critic of to-day would be glad to know about this young lady: the first, what had been the nature of her early reading; and the second, what was the quality of her previous and unpublished attempts at fiction. Macaulay dwells much upon the advantages which she derived from the curiously mixed society which surrounded her in Dr. Burney's house; and no doubt these advantages count for something. But in the presence of so palpable an imitation of Smollett as is the character of Captain Mervan, one may be slow to believe that all the other portraits in this singular gallery were studied from the life. And it is perhaps as permissible to doubt, upon internal evidences of style and structure, whether *Evelina* was not the result of a good many antecedent efforts at composition. The novel, as we know, was reported, before its author's name was known, to be the work of a girl of seventeen, and perhaps some part of its extraordinary vogue may have been due to this flattering mistake. But the main element in its success must surely, I

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

should think, be sought in the fact that it was the first 'novel of manners,' in the later sense of the word, that had ever been offered to the public. It was a picture of life in London, life at Bath, life at the Bristol Hot Wells, in the later eighteenth century —principally, indeed, of modish life, but with just so much of a side glance at the gaieties and affectations of the middle class as would give it additional piquancy to the taste of the superiors whom they strove to imitate. The delights of Ranelagh and the watering-place assembly rooms are varied by those of the suburban subscription ball. The amusements, the interests, the conversations are all those of the polite, or of the would-be polite, world. The course of true love is hindered by the machinations of an unscrupulous baronet ; the heroine marries a virtuous peer. Society was unused to finding itself made an object of such direct and minute presentation, unused to studying the history of fictitious personages whose circle of occupations, hopes, fears, desires, ambitions was so exactly identical with its own. And while society read the book eagerly, and as eagerly sought out and lionized the author, so the literary coteries, or rather the one literary coterie of the day, partly following the fashion, partly led by its own autocratic leader, gathered round her also. Dr. Johnson was the warm friend of her father, and had an almost fatherly affection for Fanny herself. Macaulay's

assertion that 'Burke, Windham, Gibbon, Reynolds, Sheridan were amongst her most ardent eulogists,' requires probably as many grains of salt as the statement just before it, that the 'timid and obscure girl found herself on the highest pinnacle of fame.' But no doubt she was the rage of fashionable London, and had secured the high though clearly not the unprejudiced commendation of the first critical authority of the day. Others, or others at least who were men of critical capacity themselves, must simply have praised the book in that half-conscious, half-unconscious excess into which praise is so likely to pass in the case of a literary production which is at once new, popular, and the work of a young woman.

For no tenderness towards this subject of a hundred-years-old nine-days' wonder ought to induce a candid critic of to-day to conceal his conviction that *Evelina* is a very crude performance. Macaulay, whose professed admiration for it was perhaps artificially heightened by his antipathy to Croker—who thought meanly of it—excludes it, we may observe, from his detached criticisms of its author's gifts and manner, and draws all his illustrations from *Cecilia*. The only circumstantial reference to the earlier novel in his well-known essay on Madame D'Arblay's Diary and Letters is as follows:—

'One favourite story in particular haunted her imagination. It was about a certain Caroline Evelyn, a beautiful damsel, who

made an unfortunate love match, and died, leaving an infant daughter. Frances began to image to herself the various scenes, tragic and comic, through which the poor motherless girl, highly connected on one side, meanly connected on the other, might have to pass. A crowd of unreal beings, good and bad, grave and hideous, surrounded the pretty, timid young orphan—a coarse sea-captain ; an ugly, insolent fop, blazing in a superb court dress ; another fop, as ugly and as insolent a one, lodged on Snow Hill, and tricked out in second-hand finery for the Hampstead ball ; an old woman, all wrinkles and rouge, flirting her fan with the air of a miss of seventeen, and screaming in a dialect made up of vulgar French and vulgar English ; a poet, lean and ragged, with a broad Scotch accent. By degrees these shadows acquired stronger and stronger consistence, the impulse which urged Frances to write became irresistible, and the result was the History of Evelina.'

Unfortunately the shadows, in acquiring consistence, have too often become the crudest caricatures. The coarse sea-captain is as coarse as any of Smollett's ' salts,' and with less humour to redeem his brutality ; the fops, less extravagantly treated, have no flavour of original study and first-hand drawing ; the rouged and wrinkled old woman is sometimes a mere tedious infliction, at others a violent impossibility. The scenes of horse-play, in which she figures with her tormentor the captain, and in one of which she is actually made to spit in his face, cannot possibly have corresponded to anything within Miss Burney's personal experiences. They can only be the result of a purely imaginative attempt to describe what seemed to her the probable consequences of turning a ' sea-dog ' loose in a drawing-room. It is

not necessary to have lived in the last quarter of the eighteenth century to feel certain that they desperately offend probability ; for they plainly exceed what the author's own account of the conventions of the society she is describing shows to be the limits of the possible. The humours of Captain Mervan and Madame Duval are no doubt the worst blots on the book to the taste of a modern reader ; but *Evelina* is a gallery of very coarsely-handled portraits, diversified by a few feebly executed sketches, from end to end. The hero, Lord Orville, is a lay figure ; Sir Clement Willoughby has but intermittent life ; the Branghtons, though they are drawn with more spirit, and certainly seem to be sketches from nature, are but moderately successful. It is only in the characters of Lady Louisa and her indifferent *fiancé* that we seem to come upon traces of anything but the most superficial observation, and the most rudimentary art. Nothing, in a word, appears to me to explain the extraordinary popularity attained by *Evelina* except its mere novelty of *genre*, aided, it may be, by the purely accidental cause which has been suggested above.

At the same time it would be too much to say that the book shows neither ability nor promise. It shows something of the one, and more of the other ; and *Cecilia* is undoubtedly an incomparably better novel than *Evelina*. Most of the conversations and

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

incidents are at least possible ; the colours of characterisation are less glaring ; the heroine is a more clearly defined individuality ; the story of the novel possesses far more variety and interest than that of its predecessor. It is admittedly Miss Burney's best work : it was certainly her most popular one (for *Camilla*, published fourteen years afterwards, gained nothing like the reception of her two earlier novels), and it would be unjust to deny it the merit of a certain liveliness of dialogue and animation of narrative. But the language in which Macaulay speaks of it—even when he professes to be recording and not expressing opinion—cannot be read, I think, by anyone who compares the book, not only with earlier but with later models, with other feelings than those of blank amazement. As a novel of manners we may concede it a right to a certain artificiality of style and tone : as a novel of 'humours,' to adopt Macaulay's classification of it, we might make allowance for a certain considerable latitude in the way of caricature. But really, that any critic of such copiously informed, if somewhat unequal judgment as Macaulay should seriously and without protest write of it that 'those who saw *Cecilia* in manuscript pronounced it the best novel of the age,' that '*Cecilia* was placed by general acclamation among the classical novels of England,' and that the critic who wrote thus should be capable of proving in the same

essay that he was able to appreciate the genius of Jane Austen—this must surely be attributed rather to some persistent influence of early traditions than to any independent and deliberate exertion of the critical faculty. He says with obvious truth that ‘humours,’ meaning individual eccentricities, ‘ruling passions,’ hobbies, do exist, and are therefore proper subjects for the imitations of art; and he adds as truly, that though ‘the imitation of such humours, however skilful and amusing, is not an achievement of the highest order,’ though ‘they are rare in real life, and ought to be sparingly introduced into works which profess to be pictures of real life,’ a writer ‘may nevertheless show so much genius in the exhibition of these humours as to be fairly entitled to a permanent and distinguished rank among classics.’ Sterne’s is a case in point. He is essentially a portrayer of humours, but his genius for that order of portraiture has justly earned him a permanent and distinguished place among English classics. But can a claim to genius even under these limitations be seriously put forward on behalf of Fanny Burney? If it is admitted that we must not look in her pages for Fielding’s vigorous truth to nature, or Goldsmith’s delicacy and subtlety of delineation, can we look there without disappointment, I will not say for Sterne’s mastery of the grotesque, but for any signs of a cognate power? To reduce the question

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

to the simplest of all possible tests, are Miss Burney's caricatures funny even as caricatures? Speaking as one who may claim to have served a fairly long apprenticeship as a taster of the humorous, in every variety of age and body, I own that I can detect very little flavour in any of the Burney brands, and I have some difficulty in believing that it ever really outlived the year of their vintage. Is Mr. Briggs humorous? Is Mr. Hobson? Will any reader lay his hand on his heart and declare that the 'skipping officious impertinence' of Mr. Morrice diverts instead of boring him? Or if he does find some drollery in these characters, will he contend that the 'genius shown in the exhibition of these humours' is sufficient to compensate for the monstrous outrages on probability which are committed whenever Mr. Albany appears on the scene? Miss Burney laid claim to wit as well as humour, but has she succeeded any better in her endeavours after this much commoner kind of excellence? Let the sarcasms of Mrs. Selwyn in *Evelina*, and those of Mr. Gosport in *Cecilia*—sarcasms almost comparable with the rude and flippant sallies which pass for epigram in the second-rate comedietta of the present day—supply the answer.

The fame of Miss Burney declined pretty rapidly after the publication of her third novel. This did not appear till fourteen years after *Cecilia*—namely,

in 1796. But her publishers, from whom she is said to have received a large sum of money for *Camilla*, on the strength, it is to be supposed, of her previous reputation, must have burnt their fingers by the venture. It failed to hit the public taste—failed as completely as Miss Burney's subsequent memoirs of her father, and, indeed, as everything else that she subsequently wrote. She seems, in fact, to have been the '*Miss Betty*' of the literary world; and it is as difficult to understand in these days that she could ever have been the admiration of a lettered coterie, as it must have been for the friends of the '*Young Roscius's*' later years to realise in the person of that stout, middle-aged, respectable gentleman the juvenile prodigy for whom the playgoing public had for the time deserted all the great actors of their day. Yet the tradition of her high merit as a writer, or rather of the high merit of her two principal novels, must have survived well into the present century, since it has so strongly influenced the mind of a man like Macaulay, who could hardly have spoken—consistently at least with his appreciation of far better art—in the terms in which he does speak of Fanny Burney, unless some of the purely imitative predilections of boyhood had been allowed by him to mingle untested with the judgments of his maturer years. The comparison which he institutes between the authors of *Evelina* and the author of *Emma*—the

former highly skilled in 'the exhibition of humours,' but unable to set before us, as the latter does, an entire character—is perfectly sound, but at the same time so comically inadequate as to provoke a smile. It is as though one should gravely point out that Sir Joshua Reynolds is a greater master than an ale-house sign-painter, *because* the faces of Sir Joshua's portraits display great potentialities of varied emotion, whereas the worthy sign-painter is content with having exhibited the single quality of rampancy in a blue lion. We admit the justice of the remark, but cannot feel that it is the last word of discrimination between the two pictorial styles. And without, of course, going so far as to say that the great novelist of manners of the early nineteenth century is raised so far above her immediate predecessor of the eighteenth as Sir Joshua excels the limner of the blue lion, one can and must say that the points of distinction between the two writers (points from which Macaulay has, for the purpose of his argument, selected one alone) are at least as numerous and as salient as those which can be traced between the two painters.

It must be admitted, however, at the outset, that the common subject-matter of the two writers had undergone an extraordinary transformation, to the advantage of the latter, between the dates of their respective writings. The French Revolution occurred within ten years of the publication of *Cecilia*, and be-

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

fore Jane Austen had reached her twentieth year. The chief works of the younger novelist are divided by less than a generation from the most successful production of the elder; but as pictures of society, what a gulf divides them! In truth, if we wish to gain an adequate idea of the social, moral, and intellectual changes wrought in Europe by the portent of 1789-93, we should look for them not in English poetry but in English fiction. The spirit, manner, and poetic canons of the school of Wordsworth do not differ so widely from those of the school of Pope as do the social tone and language, the social usages and ideas which pervade the pages of Miss Austen from those which we meet with in the pages of Miss Burney. Allowance made for the purely superficial distinctions of costume and outward behaviour, a greater ceremoniousness of demeanour, and a few, a very few, occasional archaisms of language, the men and women of *Pride and Prejudice* or of *Northanger Abbey* are the men and women of the Victorian age. With a few similar allowances, the men and women of *Evelina* and *Cecilia* would pass for men and women of the age of Anne. It would seem as if the broader and deeper characteristics of English society had remained unchanged for nearly ninety years, and then had been suddenly transformed into a shape which they were to retain for eighty or ninety more.

The change, however, was one eminently suited,

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

by its tendency to a greater simplicity, to promote the artistic development of the novel of manners. And accordingly, the highest point to which it has ever been, or to which perhaps it ever can be, brought, it has reached in the hands of Miss Austen. No other writer of fiction has ever achieved such great results by such insignificant means ; none other has, upon material so severely limited, expended such beauty, ingenuity, and precision of workmanship. Her novels, indeed, are novels of manners in a sense in which certainly not those of Miss Burney—since not even those of Thackeray—can be said to deserve that name. For Miss Burney continually, and Thackeray in no inconsiderable measure—even in novels of the *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* type—seek attractions for the reader in much else than the simple portrayal of character. Sentiment, not to say sentimentalism, plays a large part in the work of the former ; plot and incident, though not abundant, are by no means wanting to that of the latter. The author of *Evelina* and *Cecilia* is liberal of her moral reflections ; the author of *The Newcomes* and *Barry Lyndon* is mainly prized by many of his admirers for a caustic criticism of life. But all these devices of the art of the story-teller—partly, no doubt, through limitations of personal experience, but also, I imagine, and in much greater measure, by her own deliberate choice as an artist acutely sensible of where her real power

lay—Jane Austen entirely denied herself. The plots of her stories, though excellently conceived for her purposes, are usually of the simplest and most obvious description ; her characters are, so far as their positions and circumstances go, just such as might fall in the way of any young woman of the upper middle class, resident for the most part in the country, but varying her life by occasional visits to Bath or London ; her incidents are just what might find daily entry in such a young woman's diary. The parson and the squire, the young military or naval officer, the Oxford or Cambridge undergraduate, the retired professional man with his wife and daughters, and occasionally the titled Lady Bountiful of a rural parish—these are the commonplace personages who fill her pages, and in our presence live their commonplace lives.

It has often been observed that Miss Austen never brings before us, except in the briefest possible fashion, any man, woman, or child of the poorer classes ; and when she does, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, it is perhaps with something less than her usually unerring felicity of touch. She confined herself all but wholly to the class in which she was born and bred, and which she had studied ; neither, as has been said, did she invent interesting situations for her personages of this class, but was content to take them as merely performing the every-day acts and undergo-

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

ing the unromantic experiences of the society around her. Never was drama so unsensational enacted on a stage so sternly denuded of scenic accessories of any sort; yet never was drama enacted from first to last in so resolutely dramatic a spirit. Passion, the word and the thing, is absolutely unknown to any hero or heroine of Miss Austen's; the mere excitement and exhilaration of rapid action she deliberately foregoes; but yet, while surrendering all these facilities, and resisting all these temptations of the dramatic form, she never deviates from that form, never needs relief from it herself, nor, with the sublime presumption characteristic of genius, ever allows herself to suppose that her hearers can need such relief themselves. Neither does she turn aside, or imagine that you will care to turn aside, from the exquisite life-studies which she is executing before you, to gaze, even for the briefest interval, at external nature. That perpetual *divisorium* at which the novelist of to-day is perpetually 'putting up' is not for her. It may be supposed that, if she had no high æsthetic sensibilities in that regard, she possessed at any rate that appreciation of the simple rural beauty of England which no country-bred Englishwoman of refined life and thoughtful disposition is likely to be without. Yet it would be difficult to find two consecutive pages, if even two consecutive paragraphs, of landscape painting in the whole of Miss Austen's works.

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

Nor does she take refuge from her labours of minute portraiture in that other common solace of later novelists—the impersonation of Chorus. No one soliloquizes so rarely as she. Her characters hold a score of conversations with each other for one that she holds with the reader. Nothing can differ more than her manner in this respect from that of the inferior artist who doth so abound among us at this day—that keeper of the marionettes whose puppets explain so little of their characters in the course of their rare and ineffective dialogues with each other that the voice of their manipulator can never afford to be long silent at the wings. Miss Austen compels character to unfold itself in dialogue and action, unaided, or almost unaided, by comment and criticism of the writer's own. Only those who have attempted this feat for themselves can be fully sensible of its difficulty; but others may form some rough estimate of it by observing the regularity with which it is shirked by nineteen novelists out of twenty.

It is one of the great merits of Scott's vivid and faithful draughtsmanship that he makes this so constant an aim of his endeavours; but no one more generously admitted that difference of conditions which made it a so much easier achievement for him than for her. An often-quoted passage from the diary in Lockhart's *Life* contains the fullest recognition of this. 'Read again, and for the third time at

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

least, Miss Austen's finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice*. That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements, and feelings, and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me. What a pity such a gifted creature died so early! But much more, of course, than 'truth of sentiment and description' goes to the creation of Jane Austen's power and charm. A profound insight into the workings of the calmer and commoner human feelings and motives—this and a marvellously subtle humour were the two gifts which she was the first to bring in anything like such profusion to the 'novel of manners.' And the purest novels of manners, in the sense in which I have endeavoured to define the phrase, her stories are. They give, and they confine themselves strictly to giving, a picture of human life as it presents itself under the most rigid rules of social convention, with only such actions described, such characters and feelings depicted, as these rules permit of being displayed.

The problem which she proposes to herself is, in fact, this: Given just so many and no more inches of upturned mould on the surface of human nature, to

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

determine the character and constituents of the sub-soil to as great a depth as possible. That, of course, is the problem which every novelist of manners must propose to himself who wishes to rise above the level of a moral and mental *modiste*, merely doing for the manners of society what the fashion-books do for its costumes; but one may safely say that the marvellous success with which that problem might be attacked was never revealed nor could ever have been realised until the creator of the Bennets and the Dashwoods first took it in hand. Then for the first time a woman showed the world that human nature trimmed and partered by the hand of the gardener, Society, into accordance with the primmest Dutch taste is human nature still, and that it was within the power of the botanical expert to trace the affinities of its most highly cultivated specimens with the wild growths, and sometimes even with the noxious weeds that flourish beyond the garden wall. The saving qualities which redeem this operation from both the dulness and the repulsiveness of science are, of course, the qualities of sympathy and humour—qualities the utter absence and the apparently unsuspected need of which form together the amply sufficient explanation of much of that dismal writing of the ‘analytical’ order which nowadays imagines itself to be art. The quickness and the breadth of Miss Austen’s sympathy with moods and temperaments the most

various may be traced on almost every page of her writings; and that subtly humorous aroma which impregnates nearly every sentence would require a whole essay to do it justice. But what is still more striking about her, and, indeed, what probably is alike the secret of her extraordinary insight into character, and of her admirable finesse in delineating it, is the unusually perfect balance which humour and sympathy seem to have always maintained in her mind.

It is sympathy which saves the novelist from over-drawing human foibles, humour which prevents him from over-estimating human virtues. To be reasonably just to his characters the novelist must possess at least a more than average share of both qualities. When both, as in Miss Austen's case, are equally balanced, and when, above all, the more wayward of the two instincts is held in check by an imperious artistic conscience, the result is perfect truth. But the artistic conscience—the power of self-restraint, the ability to hold the hand and to refrain from that last touch to which the undisciplined instinct of comedy so alluringly persuades us—this, after all, is the great thing to possess, and the difficult thing to obey. To those who are at all capable of measuring the humorous possibilities of a situation or of a character, there is something no less surprising, and to some, perhaps, no less disappointing, than admir-

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

able in Miss Austen's masterly reserve. Among all her delightful pieces of comic portraiture I know of but one instance in which her sense of humour has overcome her fidelity to nature, and strict artistic truth has been sacrificed to the desire of heightening the absurdity of one of the most exquisitely absurd of moral grotesques. I refer to the character of Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. Here it seems to me that, for the first and last time, she found the humours of one of her own creations irresistible, and allowed herself to be betrayed into a caricature of which, however, even the sternest of critics would be loth to part with a single ridiculous trait. It is this severe reserve of Miss Austen's which makes her seem to some readers tame and colourless. To such we can have nothing to offer but a recommendation of patience, and the assurance that, if ever they acquire the taste for this simplest and yet most delicate of literary diets, they will grow to wonder that their palates could ever have relished any coarser food.

What, the question of course arises—what, in this day of universal novel-writing, is the present position of the novel of manners? During the second quarter of the century it found, as everyone knows, its most brilliant representative in the person of Thackeray. It would be preposterous to rank Miss Austen with Thackeray in respect of intellectual grasp, and both idle and invidious to attempt any comparative esti-

mate of their respective styles of workmanship. In breadth, both of stroke and canvas, they differ vastly from each other, and Thackeray is yet further distinguished from Miss Austen in having travelled, and with signal success, beyond the region of the novel of manners into that of historic romance and imaginative study. Miss Austen not only never attempted anything like *Esmond* or *Barry Lyndon*, but she never finds occasion even for the accidental display of these peculiar qualities which make an *Esmond* or a *Barry Lyndon* possible. Yet in his other books, and those perhaps on which his fame most securely rests—in *Pendennis*, in *Vanity Fair*, in *The Newcomes*—one may describe him, subject to the reservation made a few pages back, as hardly less emphatically a novelist of manners than Miss Austen herself. His *range* of characters is of course larger than hers, but their *caste*, their *order* is the same; or, rather, it is the same, with an addition in Thackeray's case which is practically no addition—that of the class of domestic servants: the butlers, footmen, valets, lady's-maids, housekeepers whom he has sketched so admirably, but who really mix with, belong to, and must be studied as adjuncts of those upper classes to whom, in other respects, his study was entirely confined. Thackeray, in short, lives, and will live, in our history as essentially the great novelist of manners of the period during which he flourished—a period, be it

remembered, which, among writers in the same order of fiction, included Disraeli (considered from the non-political side of him) and (when he was not in the big bow-wow vein) the first Lord Lytton.

The third quarter of the nineteenth century has been the flourishing time of perhaps the most popular novelist of manners who ever lived—the late Mr. Trollope: to whom no one can deny the merit of careful observation, and who, if he could have brought himself to recognise that a man may become a machine, that machines do not think, and that thought is as necessary as observation to intelligent portraiture, might have well deserved all the popularity which he achieved. Since Mr. Trollope's death it would be hard to name any living representative of the school. Indeed, there is some reason to suspect that the school, as a school, has perished. In one sense almost every novelist we have is a novelist of manners; in another sense, none of them are. That is to say, there is not an inventor of sunsets and love-scenes, not a chronicler of 'runs' and steeple-chases, not a delineator of theatrical life and character, not a feminine diarist of the doings of the wicked guardsman, who would not be seriously offended at the imputation that he or she fails in the accurate portraiture of contemporary manners; but, on the other hand, all of them—'spooning' novelists, sporting novelists, theatrical novelists—are concerned with

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

scenery, passion, incident *first*, and with manners afterwards. They all make grandly *nonchalant* pretences of knowingness in the ways of the world in general, and of modern society in particular; but where the novel of manners has not degenerated in their hands into that very different article, the ‘fashionable novel,’—where it does not recall the vulgarity without recalling the unquestionable cleverness of the once famous Mrs. Gore, it is hardly to be recognised for what it professes to be. The novel of modern life and society, in so far as it does not rely for its attractions on mere sensational incident, is generally a study of male and female character—mostly, indeed, of one male and one female character—with a few elaborate sketches of scenery for a background, and a clumsy caricature of some two or three well-known contemporary personages thrown in to give it an air of actuality. The close objective study of social *types*—not of their superficial peculiarities only, but of their inner being—appears to be becoming a lost art. Where, indeed, are we to look for the observation, the humour, to say nothing of the *wisdom*, which was brought to bear upon this branch of the art of fiction by its great masters in the past? We have but one living novelist with the adequate intellectual equipment; but Mr. George Meredith is poet, philosopher, and politician, as well as novelist, and we must be satisfied, I suppose, that

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS

brilliant studies of manners form an element, and an element only, in his varied and stimulating work. For the rest, we have 'pretty' writers in abundance, and a few of genuine power in the creation of individual character. But the generalising eye, the penetrative humour, and the genial breadth of sympathy, which is needed to portray the social pageant as a whole, appear to be gifts which are becoming rarer and rarer among us every day.

NEWSPAPERS AND ENGLISH

A DIALOGUE

Minutius. What, Scriptorius ! corrupting your style by studying a newspaper ? Didn't I understand you to say that you were composing a paper to be read this evening before the Eclectic Society ?

Scriptorius. How do you know I am not studying one of my own leaders ?

Min. How do you know that that is not exactly what I am assuming ?

Scrip. Oh ! then you believe that a man whose style would not otherwise be vicious, may demoralise it by reading his own writings ?

Min. Many a man could have no worse model. But you know very well what I mean. What you are reading in that newspaper is not your own writing, in the sense of being your own thoughts expressed in your own language. It is the thoughts of your political party expressed in the language of—well, in the language of your guild. I can't describe it

otherwise. It is essentially a language of itself English, of course, or at any rate for the most part, in its vocabulary; English, too, in its accidence and syntax, and differing, therefore, in the first of these two respects from a 'patter,' and in the second from a *patois*—from the cant or *argot* of a class on the one hand, and from the dialect of a tribe on the other. And in both respects—but perhaps I offend you by my freedom.

Scrip. Not at all. I am admiring the accuracy of your philological criticism. The peculiar diction of journalism has never, I think, been better described. I recognise at once the elements both of its weakness and its strength, the sources alike of its power and its limitations. All I fail to perceive is its corrupting influence. If it is neither *argot* nor *patois*, where is the mischief of using it?

Min. Where! Why, my dear fellow, in the very fact on which you seem to rely. No one is the worse for possessing a knowledge of slang, or acquiring the mastery of a dialect; for neither pretends to be more than an accretion upon, or a corruption of, the language to which it belongs. It is not the medal or the token that debases a currency, it is the spurious coin—and the more mischievously in proportion to the closeness of the imitation. If the journalistic 'lingo' has either a little more of the metal, or a little less of the semblance of genuine English, its

enormously wide circulation in these days would no doubt do comparatively little harm.

Scrip. Whereas?

Min. Eh? what? Oh, come, Scriptorius, these dialectical thrustings of a naturally polite man into the corner of incivility are really in bad taste. Well, then, if you will have it—whereas its circulation produces, as it is, an effect which I could not correctly describe without comparing a most excellent man, and my very good friend, to a professional manufacturer of bad half-crowns.

Scrip. Good. And now let me express my extreme surprise, Minutius, that a man of your independent judgment and force of character should have permitted yourself to become the mouth-piece of so false and silly a cry as that which I have now for the first time heard you echo. Have you ever really examined the grounds of the charge which you are making against the newspapers?

Min. Well, of course I have not scrutinised it as jealously as though it were a tribute to their merits. You are always demanding some impossibilities of self-mortifying rigour.

Scrip. If you have not examined it, let me do so for you.

Min. Do; and put the results of your inquiries into a 'social' leader, as I understand you and your fellow-craftsmen describe every disquisition you give

us on any subject at all broader or of more permanent interest than last night's Parliamentary debate, whether it be an excursion into the Philosophy of the Unconscious, or a thoughtful essay on the true method of disposing of the metropolitan sewage.

Scrip. Well, I conceive that both are subjects with which society is more or less concerned.

Min. Undoubtedly—more or less; but so, after all, it is supposed to be with politics. To divide all subjects of human interest into political and social, and to lump together as 'social' all that infinite variety of matters which lie outside the range, as I say, of last night's Parliamentary debate, does strike one as a somewhat rough and ready method of classification. But perhaps you do not go so far as to maintain that journalism actually tends to promote philosophic accuracy in the use of language.

Scrip. I don't know what I may find myself contending for when we once get fairly in dispute: it is that, I think, which constitutes one of the most pleasing features of familiar controversy, and—

Min. Stop! I beg your pardon! One moment just to take down the phrase you have last let fall. All right, go on!

Scrip. I see what is preparing for me, and I defy you. But to finish what I was saying. I do not propose to maintain, at least for the present, that journalism 'tends'—I had better repeat your exact

words—‘to promote philosophic accuracy in the use of language.’ When an unfortunate gentleman is brought up on a charge of coining, the first thing for him to do is to rebut the accusation. It will be time enough for him to attempt to show that he is a public benefactor when he has satisfied his judge that he is not a public malefactor. So here. I shall be quite content, at any rate for the present, with acquitting myself and my fellows of the charge of debasing or defacing the verbal coinage of my country without claiming to have purified or brightened it. Enough if we do not clip or alloy the money of the English tongue; it is too much to expect of us, or for us to claim for ourselves, that the coins come out of our hands with more gold in them to the ounce, and with a sharper and cleaner cut device and legend upon their face. The second position I cannot hope to establish; the first I can and will.

Min. ‘To’t’ then! as our friend the Danish grave-digger says. ‘To’t.’

Scrip. I am quite ready! What is the charge?

Min. Eh? the charge? Well, upon my word I thought I had expressed it with great precision:

Scrip. What, by a metaphor! A pretty situation if a man’s life is to depend upon his accuser’s possessing a just appreciation of analogy and a nice discrimination in the employment of rhetorical figures.

Min. 'A^tion! 'a^tion! 'a^tion! I shall have something to say about that presently.

Scrip. With all my heart; and in the meantime I will meet your accusation in the form it took at the very opening of this colloquy. You made, or you implied, the charge against newspaper writers of corrupting the English prose style. That is a little different, of course, from the charge of debasing the English language, and as, being much the more vague, it is the easier to sustain and the harder to refute, I daresay you will prefer that form of the accusation to the other.

Min. I think, if you don't mind, I should like to avail myself of both, though not, of course, at the same time.

Scrip. I am obliged to you for that last concession, at any rate. It is by no means a common form of forbearance, I assure you.

Min. Well, then, as to debasing the language—

Scrip. Yes, as to debasing the language. I shall be happy to save you as much trouble as possible in establishing that part of your case. Allow me to read you a list of admissions which I have at various times committed to paper with a view to the discussion of this particular subject. I admit that when facts 'transpire,' in correct English it does not mean that they occur, and it does mean that having occurred they get abroad; whereas, by transpiring in

newspaper English, they do not get abroad, but only happen. I admit that when we call a man 'reliable,' we neither strengthen nor adorn the English language, and I may here add that I have tried not to smile when I have heard, as I actually have, a purist object to the word on the ground that as long as 'trustworthy' was *available* to express the idea, 'reliable' could not be *indispensable*. In other words, I recognise a mysterious guilt in burking the preposition 'on' which does not attach to the suppression of the particles 'of' and 'with.' I admit further that the words—

Min. There, that will do. You need not give us the whole string of pearls. I know it is a long one. But since you admit the solecisms—

Scrip. Ah! Unfortunate people of Soli! Do you believe they really spoke worse Greek than their neighbours—that they were really sinners against grammar above all men that dwelt in Cilicia? O Soli! O Siloam! It is the way of the world, however. Those unlucky colonists, and we unlucky journalists, are simply the 'eighteen upon whom the tower fell.'

Min. Oh, nonsense! You are evading the gist of the charge. The accusation against you is not that you use worse English than other people—

Scrip. Members of Parliament, for instance. Why, they owe the only grammar they can boast of to

those who have least of it to spare among ourselves. Our most indigent class contrives to give of its superfluity to the destitute senator; and out of the scanty grammatical wardrobe of the reporter is his nakedness clothed. Nay, the figure is not strong enough. The debt of the parliamentary orator to the parliamentary reporter is not for clothing alone, but for surgery—for the splints upon the fractures of his sentences, and for the sutures of their gaping wounds.

Min. My dear *Scriptorius*, you give yourself a vast amount of unnecessary trouble. No one has ventured upon anything so audacious as to compare the grammar of debate, or even of completed legislation, with that of the newspaper.

Scrip. The Bar, then? or the pulpit? Even in the ablest of those forensic speeches which decide the issue of a lawsuit, how many nominatives remain ‘pending?’ How often will the changes of heart among a congregation compare either in suddenness or completeness with the changes of construction in their preacher’s sentences?

Min. You seem to forget that grammatical errors are somewhat more pardonable in spoken than in written discourse: but I repeat that the charge against you is not that newspapers use worse English—and please to observe that it is you who are now mixing up questions of syntax with those of vocabu-

lary—than other people, but that owing to the enormous audiences whom they address daily they infect the largest possible number of people with their own habits of inaccuracy.

Scrip. And I have really lived to hear that parrot cry from lips so accustomed to utter sense as yours. What man capable of being so ‘infected,’ as you call it, can have any health in him? Take the score or so of solecisms—if there be so many—for which the newspapers have obtained currency. By whom, pray, among their readers are they picked up and made use of? By those who have otherwise any purity of speech to be contaminated? or by those—the uneducated—who learn more genuine words of their mother-tongue from the newspaper than from any other printed matter, and who daily commit ten times as many sins against the language and its grammar than the newspaper is guilty of in a year?

Min. The more ignorant the reader, the easier, of course, to corrupt him; but I am far from admitting that newspapers have not taught tricks of incorrect speech to people whom education might otherwise have enabled to avoid them.

Scrip. Then enumerate these tricks, I beg of you, and let us see how many they amount to. Do not trust to your ‘transpire’ and your ‘reliable,’ and the one or two other stale examples of inaccuracies which the journalist was either not the first to commit, or

has done more than anyone else to expose and ridicule. Let us hear the whole list. I shall be much surprised if the number of such offences which can fairly be brought home to the newspaper-writer are found to exceed a dozen.

Min. Be it so, my dear Scriptorius, be it so. Moreover, the charge of corrupting our vocabulary is not one on which I am personally much disposed to rely. The number of questionable additions which the language has received from the newspapers must necessarily be small : for, if we except the lendings of recognised slang, the total number of such additions which have been made from any source during the present age is itself not considerable.

Scrip. Now that last is a proposition which I should have been inclined to dispute. But proceed : I daresay I shall have an opportunity of disputing it later on.

Min. I *have* known you go so far as to create one. I don't know, however, that I had much more to say when you interposed, except this : that the much more plausible charge against you and your fellow-penmen is that of depraving English style. I should like to hear you on that point, I confess.

Scrip. Would you ? Then you must give me something to answer. What is to 'deprave' a style ? What is English style ? Nay, what is style itself ?

Min. Why stop there, my dear fellow? Pray go on. By all means let us thresh the whole matter thoroughly out. What is the origin of language? What are the casual relations and what the order of succession in time between the class-name and the concept? By what process—

Scrip. You are wasting your satire upon me, my friend. My question was a simple one enough from the experimental side, and not requiring any profound researches into the metaphysics of philology in order to answer it. One need not know the chemistry of either pure or muddy water to be able to say when one has been contaminated by the other. The eye will tell you that the liquid has become turbid. But I think that when you are asserting, not the fact of contamination, but the process, you are bound to give some intelligible account of the pure water, and some rational description of the mud.

Min. Well, there is no great difficulty in that, if you will allow me to confine myself to it. But, do you know, I have for some unaccountable reason—

Scrip. Some 'unaccountable-for' reason you would say, if you were a reliable-on grammarian.

Min. Conceived a strong desire to attempt the task you offer to excuse me from. I should like to define 'style' in language.

Scrip. Meaning, I suppose, the correct, the 'best style'?

Min. Exactly.

Scrip. Then you believe there is only one to which that description applies?

Min. You shall see. Style, then, as I should define it, consists in such a choice and collocation of words, combined with such individual structure and collective arrangement of sentences, as may, while giving the clearest, briefest, and most forcible expression to the thought, assist at the same time the most powerfully to maintain in the reader the state of feeling most appropriate to the subject-matter.

Scrip. Allow me, my dear Minutius, to congratulate you.

Min. On my definition?

Scrip. On your wind. If I remember rightly you won the mile race in our school athletics; but I had no idea you still kept yourself in such excellent training in middle age.

Min. Your ironical compliment, if you only knew it, is genuinely flattering. Length of wind is most valuable to those who have a long distance to travel, and I maintain that my definition is not to be shortened by a single stage. Choice of words and order of words we all admit to be points of first importance to style; nor less so, the arrangement of sentences. Nor will you deny that clearness, brevity, and force in the expression of thought are three qualities of equivalent necessity to whosoever lays claim to the

mastery of a good style. The first suffices only for the equipment of a Parliamentary draftsman. Acts of Parliament convey their meaning clearly.

Scrip. Do they ?

Min. The ideal Act of Parliament does. All legal documents express, or are supposed to express, the meaning embodied in them with clearness, and some few do so with brevity—that is without superabundance of words, but none of them study to do so with force. Of two words equally unambiguous, of two constructions equally apt, of two sentences equally short, the lawyer and the Parliamentary draftsman do not of design select that word which is the most telling, that construction or sentence which drives most smartly home the nail of meaning with the hammer of emphasis. And lastly, having neither of them any particular state of *feeling* in their readers—nothing but a purely intellectual condition—to take account of, neither of them are, of course, in the least degree solicitous about the existence of any corresponding quality in their work. It is only where to clearness, brevity, and force of expression a writer adds that tact and sensibility which keeps the tone of his diction in harmony with the feelings suggested by his thought that he becomes master, in my judgment at least, of the gift of style.

Scrip. You say nothing of simplicity.

Min. Why should I? How can the clearest

and briefest expression be other than the simplest?

Scrip. Nor of grace.

Min. Fulfil the commandment I have given you, and grace shall be added unto you. Grace is only symmetry, and symmetry only the perfect balance and mutual adaptation of component parts. Let thought but wed itself to expression, as my canon, I believe, unites them, and grace will be born.

Scrip. H'm: the parentage seems a little commonplace, but highly respectable. Much, however, that passes for grace in literature is not, I fear, the offspring of any lawful union whatever. However, I am extremely obliged to you for permitting me to hear your views on the subject. And now shall we resume our discussion?

Min. By all means: but I am not without hopes of exhibiting a certain remote connection between what I have been saying and the matter in hand.

Scrip. What! All that highly abstract and to my intelligence, if you will excuse its weakness, that decidedly hazy stuff about adapting the tone of the writer to the feeling of the reader—stuff which if it has, as of course it has, meaning—

Min. Thank you! Your faith is touching.

Scrip. Can only mean that there is no such thing as style in the singular number, but as many different styles as there are differences of subject-matter.

Min. And suppose that is what I mean to main-

tain? What if style should be, in the ultimate analysis, not an objective quality of language, but a certain subjective relation between the mode of the writer as affected by his theme and an objective—

Scrip. Exactly! What if it should be?

Min. Scoff not, O professional scoffer! Even the words 'objective' and 'subjective' *may* conceal a definite meaning. Perhaps I shall put it in words less open to the jests of the irreverent if I say concretely that the writer who possesses style must possess in more or less near approach to perfection the power of fitting all varieties of matter to corresponding varieties of manner, and that the writers who do not display that power, great as many of them, immortal as some of them are, are nothing other—I shrink, in speaking of men so illustrious, from saying nothing more—than magnificent mannerists. What else was Gibbon? What else was Macaulay? What else Carlyle? If fitness is a condition of excellence, what can be less excellent in their ridiculous disparity with their subject-matter than some of Gibbon's stately periods when the historian of the Roman Empire is engaged upon a mean or commonplace portion of his subject. Or what, by the same test, can be less excellent than Macaulay's jerky sentences in a passage of pure narrative; or than Carlyle's violently elliptical manner where he has a 'case to state'? Give Gibbon a great event to describe,

or even a 'solemn creed to sap,' and his constant solemnity is well enough. Give Macaulay an interesting individuality—a Tory statesman's for choice—to analyse, and his crisp antithetic manner is the perfection of style, whatever historic truth may have to say to it, in relation to that particular subject-matter. Give Carlyle a dramatic incident to relate, or a picturesque figure to sketch, and his triumphs in the qualities of vividness and beauty will make us forget everything else in his writings that has ever repelled us, and pronounce him, here, at any rate, the greatest stylist that ever lived. But except in those kinds of writing wherein each excels does style exist for any one of the three?

Scrip. Perhaps not. You are victoriously achieving the victory which your definitions have prepared for you. Style, then, is nothing but the natural outcome of a plastic intelligence quickly responsive to every change of mood.

Min. Well! Is that so very unworthy an account of it?

Scrip. No, indeed. But I am forced to admit that it is beyond the reach of the humble writer in the newspapers. Circumstances are not so kind as to provide him with many of those changes of mood whereby alone he could test the elasticity and adaptability of his style. He is usually obliged to take the moods the gods provide.

Min. Let us go back, then, by all means to a simpler matter. Let us begin with the element of simplicity itself. Will you say that your beloved newspapers—

Scrip. *My* beloved newspapers!

Min. Yes, confectioner, I repeat the word. Your beloved tarts! Come! the earlier nausea of surfeit is not perpetual, and for the materials of his trade the honest man contracts an affection above the vulgarity of relish. Will you say that your newspapers have not done much to destroy, at any rate, the simplicity of English written speech?

Scrip. Will you say that they have?

Min. I will: I do. With the proviso, of course, that I do not guarantee the soundness of every separate count in the indictment. I will take the gravest first. You are accused of neglecting and despising the Saxon element in our language, and of displaying an undue and pedantic preference for Latin forms.

Scrip. What, *that* old friend! I know now why you said you would not guarantee the soundness of every separate count in the indictment. It was, indeed, a prudent precaution. I don't expect to find *you* pronouncing an educated approval of that vulgar and ignorant charge.

Min. Since when has the advocate been bound to back up his professional with his private opinion?

NEWSPAPERS AND ENGLISH

You are called upon to plead, not to cross-examine.

Scrip. I plead, then, to the jurisdiction. I have never yet met a man of those who assume to sit in judgment on newspapers upon that charge, who was philologically qualified for a seat on the bench. I have the gravest doubts whether many of those who pretend to one are able to distinguish between a Saxon and a Latin word.

Min. Oh! come now!

Scrip. I have certainly often heard some of them descanting upon the beauties of 'plain Saxon English,' in what was evidently a most happy unconsciousness that one of the three words they were using, and that the shortest and simplest, was Latin.

Min. Yes; that, no doubt, was unfortunate. But you hardly propose to contend, do you, that none of those who repeat this charge possess any safer test of the distinction between Saxon and Latin than these worthy admirers of plainness were content with?

Scrip. I do not propose to commit myself to any sweeping contentions; but I verily believe that if the number of our censors who go by no other rule than that monosyllables are Saxon and polysyllables Latin or French, could be computed, the result would a little weaken the force of their censures. Did I ever tell you of an experiment which I once tried upon one of these gentlemen with the view of ascertaining

how far his zeal for Saxon English was according to knowledge?

Min. No, I think not.

Scrip. Well, it was on this wise. In illustration of the superiority of the Saxon to the Latin element in our language, I quoted to him the following imaginary extract from an essay on the subject, and invited him to note how the very style of the passage confirmed the truth of its contents: ‘Our English,’ said the supposed essayist, ‘shall be plain, clear, pure: we will be brief; we will be simple; we will use no long words. Yet in English of this sort there need be nothing common or vulgar. I have known it to be noble, to be even grand.’ My friend was delighted with this specimen of homely Saxon, as he called it—so delighted, indeed, that I had not the heart to undeceive him: and in a moment of false humanity I did him the cruel kindness of allowing him to go away and quote it to more erudite persons as a justification of his preferences in the matter of English. ‘English,’ indeed, is one of the few words after his own heart—which it *really* contains. ‘Words’ is another, and ‘nothing’ is another. But you, of course, don’t need to be told that, deducting what I may call the mere bolts and rivets of the sentences—the prepositions, pronouns, auxiliaries, etc.—my piece of homely Saxon does not contain another purely Saxon word. Plain, clear, pure, simple Eng-

lish, as it is, there is not one other word in it which we do not either get straight from the Latin, or jointly derive, Teutonic and Latin together, from one common root.

Min. Your trap was cunningly set, I grant; or would you rather I should say it was ingeniously constructed, I concede? Come, *Scriptorius*, you must allow, I think, that it is possible to weaken a phrase by translating it from the Teutonic into the Latin, and that those who have better means of distinguishing between the two than by mere counting of syllables—though, mind, I don't altogether admit that that is so very unsafe a test in the majority of cases—are right as a rule in preferring the former to the latter.

Scrip. They are right, of course, in preferring it when it is the stronger: and provided also that—

Min. But is it not generally the stronger?

Scrip. Wait a moment. And provided also that it satisfies your own condition of superior clearness as well as of superior force. But it is in conciliating these two requirements that the difficulty of choosing between the Teutonic and the Latin is mainly felt. Yet of this difficulty our Saxon-loving friends, who are more often men whose pleasure it is to read rather than men whose business it is to write, are sublimely unconscious. Suppose I allow that the shorter, simpler, homelier words are usually Teutonic

and not Latin, and that these words, by reason, as I believe, of certain associations which for the moment I need not stop to notice, convey the more vivid impression of the act or the thing described—what then? Vividness of presentment to the imagination is not all that language has to provide for, though doubtless it is all that many writers think about; it has to provide for accuracy of presentment to the thought. The instance you just now selected—or rather created—is one upon which no difficulty could arise; for the phrase you prefer has as much the advantage in accuracy as in vigour. None but the penniest of penny-a-liners would hesitate for an instant between ‘cunningly setting’ and ‘ingeniously adjusting’ a trap, not only because the former phrase more impresses the imagination, but because the latter fails even to put the mind in full possession of the thought. The artfulness of a trapper is not fully expressed by the neutral word ingenuity; it is ingenuity directed to the capture of his prey; and, while the word ingeniously contains no suggestion of the sinister *purpose* of his act, so the word insidious, had you chosen that, would have contained no adequate suggestion of its technical *quality*. But the word ‘cunningly’ imports both. Parenthetically, however, please to remember, in abatement of your pride of Saxonism, that its moral association is not inherited, but acquired. The instance you have

chosen is, as I have said, an instance in which no difficulty of selection could possibly arise. And so, to do only justice to their dexterity in illustration, are most of the examples cited to prove the superiority of plain Saxon.

Min. Is that so?

Scrip. Well, is it not so? What do these gentlemen ever try their Saxon hands upon by way of showing their command of monosyllables, unless it be the description of some daily scene, the account of some most commonplace act, the expression of some most familiar thought of life—scene, act, and thought, for which the simple vocabulary of a child suffices, and which no sensible adult would think of describing in any other than the child's terms? Pass beyond the sphere of mere sensuous impression and of the most elementary processes of thought—enter that of conception, and still more that of ratiocination, and see how far your Saxon will carry you.

Min. A very little way, it would indeed seem. Ratiocination is not a pretty word, is it? not so neat and compact as one could wish.

Scrip. It is certainly not a word for the waistcoat pocket. As a word four syllables shorter, I should much have preferred 'reasoning'; but then, I used the longer word to illustrate my own point. Where absolute exactitude is required, 'reasoning' will not supply the place of 'ratiocination.' The former is

both a process and a product; the latter is a process alone. Depend upon it that most of the men who protest against the use of Greek words, Latin words, and generally of every word over two syllables in places where they contend that shorter synonyms 'will do,' are in fact ignorant of what will 'do,' and what will not. They may have some taste in language as a vehicle of sense, impression, and association, but they are mostly quite incapable of considering it as an instrument for the precise expression of thought. Long words in great numbers have an ugly and affected look; no man who cares for appearances in writing would string together more of them than he could help. But the high and mighty censor who strides up and down your sentences with a pen in his hand scoring out polysyllables wherever he meets them is as often as not a mere presumptuous—

Min. Stop! He won't insist on any monosyllable here, I'll be bound.

Scrip. Then I will end the sentence with ignoramus. As a quadrisyllable, and Latin after a fashion, it may annoy him even more than the triliteral Saxon. For no doubt he would regard 'ass' as 'plain' Saxon, though it isn't.

Min. Well, go on. A presumptuous ignoramus.

Scrip. Yes; as much so as the man who thinks that if *he* were a parliamentary draftsman or a con-

veyancer he could get a complex act of Parliament into a score of clauses, and a declaration of trust into as many lines. Our law, fortunately for the public, does not permit him to try his hand at condensation in the former case; in the latter case, fortunately for the lawyers, it does.

Min. Your defence of the newspapers, *Scrip-torius*, appears a curious one. So far as I can see, it tends to show, not that they are free from the faults alleged against them, but that those faults are unavoidable. We are to understand, according to you, it seems, that the newspaper-writer is neither brief nor simple, and, having to express such mightily complex ideas, cannot be expected to be either. Is that any reason, however, why his sentences should see-saw for ever, pivoted on an 'and' or a 'but,' across the trunk of a semicolon till monotony itself cries out upon them? Is that any reason why he should never make a direct statement or a direct denial, only 'venturing to believe' this, and 'permitting himself to doubt' the other? Does it justify his perpetual formalities of 'with reference to,' 'with respect to,' 'with regard to,' 'in connection with'—vile phrases, however excusable to men who seldom write 'about' a subject, but only 'about and about' it? And do the needs of this marvellous logical accuracy which he endeavours to compass warrant him in *always* rejecting the outdoor name of a thing

for that which seems to smell of the very leather of the library ? in *never* preferring that word which still retains the sharpness of its stamp and milling, to the worn counter of language, as smooth, no doubt, and as polished, but as lustreless and edgeless as an old shilling ?

Scrip. Bravo, Minutius ! You have actually condescended upon particulars at last, have you ? The charge, it is true, is getting slightly altered. The coiner, it seems, is guilty of nothing worse than a preference for coins which have seen most service. And as to all your complaints of the monotony, the circumlocution, the 'common form' of newspapers, why, faults of that kind seem hardly worth denouncing as depravations of English style. They are traceable, one and all, to defects in the journalist's material. If the public have a fancy for huge doses of politics daily, whether there is anything fresh to say about them or not, how can those who gratify this fancy avoid these faults ? How can he avoid them who has to repeat what he has said a score of times before ? and how dispense with circumlocution who has to eke out even that stale material ? As to 'common form,' pray consider its labour-saving value, and don't forbid its use to men who have to write in a hurry.

Min. I really cannot see how all this differs from confession. We both seem to agree that the style of

NEWSPAPERS AND ENGLISH

the newspaper-writer is monotonous, cumbersome, conventional, full of unmeaning stock phrases, a foe to brevity and simplicity, unvarying in its preference of the tamer to the more spirited word. We may account for it in different manners, but we agree as to the fact ; and how you can dispute, therefore, that a newspaper is one huge repertory of the vices which writers should avoid, and so a widely circulating medium of literary demoralisation, I fail to see.

Scrip. Suppose I were to convince you that the faults which you complain of in the newspaper are but the symptoms, exaggerated no doubt, but still unmistakable, of one of those changes which languages at certain periods of their history are bound to undergo, would you withdraw your charges then ?

Min. But do you really contemplate so vast an undertaking ?

Scrip. I do.

Min. Then, my dear *Scriptorius*, I must really wish you good morning. Some other day—some 21st of June, for choice—I should be only too delighted ; but for the present I must forego the pleasure, and with your leave we will regard the present discussion as a drawn game,

LUCIAN

LORD BYRON, we know, was under the impression that he hated Horace because that delightful classic had been forced so unmercifully down his throat by the instructors of his youth: The treatment of which he complains and the implied patience of his submission to it are not strikingly in accord with the earlier reputation either of the particular schoolboy or of the particular school; and one would like to have interrogated a few of the noble poet's contemporaries at Harrow on the point. But, assuming the fact to have been as stated in the well-known stanza of *Childe Harold*, one may venture perhaps to dispute the inference. The truth is that the belief which Byron there avows is too suspiciously common to be accepted with ready credence. The man who believes that only injudicious training at school has spoilt a fine scholar in his person doth greatly abound. A little less insistence on the stock Virgilian *cruces*, and he would never, he thinks, have

contracted his self-defensive passion for that particular athletic exercise in which he has subsequently achieved fame. A little more forbearance in the matter of corrupt choruses, and he might have risen on a masterly edition of *Æschylus* to the Bench of Bishops, instead of becoming merely an ornament of the Stock Exchange. Such pleasing illusions of middle age it would be cruel to disturb, and humane men for the most part treat them with respect. The truth, however, in at least ninety-nine out of every hundred such cases, is that the early blighted scholar was not really any more disgusted with his youthful experiences of the Greek and Latin tongues than was the schoolfellow who has actually ripened into a professor. It is an error to suppose that 'the rudiments' of anything can be made agreeable to anybody, least of all to the young. What is true of the dead languages is equally true of the immortal game of cricket. Many excellent men of mature years no doubt entertain the firm conviction that they would probably have 'played for the Gentlemen' if compulsory 'fagging out' had not early inspired them with a distaste for the noble game. They fail to explain how it is that the cricketer who has risen through his public school and university elevens to the deathless honour of being one of eleven amateurs selected to do battle with the Australians did his 'scouting' too as a boy, and hated

it: hated it at the time perhaps as much as many a now accomplished scholar detested his Latin accidence and his Greek irregular verbs.

No; there is not often much in the complaint that the steady and tiresome drill to which the raw recruit of scholarship has to submit disgusts him out of all capacity for appreciating those beautiful and stately evolutions of thought and language which that training alone enables him to follow. Those who do not care for these things in mature years never would have cared for them, however their boyhood had been spent; and those who do care for them know well how much of their pleasure they owe to the slow and laborious transit of their boyhood through the mill of the gerund-grinder. It will at any rate hardly be contended, I think, that the keenest sensibility to the charm of the classical masterpieces is to be found (except in one such instance out of a thousand as that of Keats) in the man who has made his first acquaintance with them as an adult; though, according to the theory I have been examining, he certainly ought to enjoy them the most. Keats, as we know, has imperishably recorded his emotions on first hearing 'Chapman speak out loud and bold' (and one may add with a freedom amounting to licence) in his translation of Homer. The poet felt like stout Cortez surveying the Pacific from a peak in Darien; but that was because he *was* a poet. And

though I do not for a moment suggest that the average schoolboy feels at all like stout Cortez on first looking into the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* in the original, I suspect that the like effect of Chapman's translation upon an average adult would be every bit as rare. The truth is that not only the vast Pacific of the Homeric poems, but even such a smaller matter as the sunny Archipelago of the Horatian Odes, by no means breaks upon most of us in the form of a sudden revelation. It is only by a gradual dispersion of the veiling mists of language, accompanied by as gradual an education of the imaginative eye, that most of us ever attain to any clear view of these great sights at all ; and, other things being equal, he whose faculty of literary vision has had the longest training is likely to see them best.

But though I do not admit that the strictly critical, or even the minutely grammatical study of the Latin and Greek classics which is or was exacted from schoolboys before they are or were of an age to appreciate the literary excellence of those works is really responsible for the consequences sometimes sought to be attached to it, I would not go so far as to deny that English scholastic traditions may somewhat too rigidly prescribe the selection of text-books. I would not take upon me to maintain that they concede as much as they might to that natural desire of the student for what he can understand and in a

great measure appreciate at the moment; and that they do as much as they might in the way of supplying him with that most potent of all incentives to the study of a language, a lively interest in the subject-matter of the work in which that language is being studied. Such a reflection presses with peculiar importunity upon a lover of Lucian. How comes it, he is apt to ask himself, that so many schoolboys have been breaking their teeth for generations past over 'craggy' bits of Thucydides, or plodding along uninterested through the Ionicisms of the Father of History, while Lucian's delightful dialogues, abounding, even for those who are too young to relish their inimitable satire, with the fascination of dramatic life and movement, have been permitted to slumber on the pedagogic shelves? For a slumber to all intents and purposes it has been, since it was never worth while to have disturbed the neglected humourist for the mere sake of the snippets of dialogue which I recollect as helping to furnish forth the school *Analecta* of forty years ago. Why should not our schoolmasters have put their sixth forms through the whole three sets of dialogues—the Dialogues of the Gods, of the Sea Gods, and of the Dead, together with *Zeus the Tragedian*, the *Icaro-Menippus*, the *Vera Historia*, and perhaps one or two other pieces? Why, above all, should not the University of Oxford have long since opened the door of Moderations (let

us hope it has done so by this time) to Lucian, as an author who may be 'taken in' to the schools as a whole? What indeed has excluded him? Not his unorthodoxy surely, for that can hardly shock anyone but a Polytheist. Not his Greek, for it is excellent, a genuine Platonic revival, in the literary instead of the philosophical sense—a revival effected by that best of revivalists, the writer who has saturated himself with the thought and style of the original. And its stimulating power for a student of the undergraduate age would of course be much greater than it is for the schoolboy who, though he is or should be able to understand and appreciate a straightforward joke, is hardly at home with irony of the graver kind. Why should not schoolboys be introduced to the *True History*, earliest of essays in the humorous-imaginative, archetype of so many a later effort of satiric fancy, founder of the family of which the immortal Captain Lemuel Gulliver is the most illustrious son? Or why not to the Icaro-Menippus, that ironical Sindbad whose aërial flight on the borrowed wings of an eagle and a vulture would surely be as full of narrative charm even for the youngest reader as his sardonic survey of our ants'-nest of an earth is full of philosophic pungency for the adult? Many of us have found it difficult to determine whether the delights of Gulliver are greater for the young than for the old—greater for those to whom Liliputians

and Brobdingnagians are merely creatures of a new and wonderful world in no allegorical relations with our own, or to those who are of an age to understand its inner meaning, and to wonder at the triumphant art by which every fresh stroke of the fancy is made to drive home the barb of the satire. Lucian as a satirist is not of course to be compared with Swift, but he possesses Swift's rare power of combining the fascinating story-teller with the grave humourist; and, minor as is the degree in which he exhibits this combination, it is sufficient to give him an absolutely unique place among the writers of the ancient world.

Let me here remark that in the foregoing sentence 'grave' is the emphatic word. There is nothing which so pointedly distinguishes Lucian from all his predecessors, Greek or Latin, in the field either of poetic or pedestrian satire—nothing which more brings him into such close kindred with the greatest satirists of modern times, than the invincible gravity of his manner. It is this which makes his elaborate and pertinacious ridicule of the Polytheistic legends in his Dialogues of the Gods and of the Dead so curiously effective. Unlike Voltaire, with whom he is often, though not always I think judiciously, compared, he never allows himself to interpolate any irrelevant witticism of his own in his exposure of the mythical absurdities of the decaying creed at which

he mocked. Dramatic propriety is always strictly maintained. His Zeus, his Hera, his Aphrodite, his Hermes, are the Zeus, Hera, Aphrodite, Hermes of the 'ages of faith.' The admirable comedy of their presentment is produced and preserved by the simple but essentially artistic device of exhibiting these survivals of a childlike and unmoral period of human thought in all their gross and glaring repugnancy to the intelligence of a refined and cultivated and sceptical era. The amours of Jove, the jealousies of his consort, the miraculous births of Minerva and Bacchus, are recounted or commented upon in a demurely matter-of-fact fashion which is infinitely more effective for the purpose than the broadest burlesque. In so far as we may regard Lucian as writing with a deliberately rationalistic purpose, he could not have adopted a better method.

But it is a mistake, I think, of the over-serious in all ages to suppose that this deliberately rationalistic purpose was always present to Lucian's mind. He was a born scoffer—not merely at holy or reputedly holy things, but at all things profane as well as sacred. For instance, much superfluous ingenuity has been expended on the question as to which, if any, school of philosophy Lucian belonged, the worthy debaters of this question having been greatly exercised in their minds by his indiscriminate ridicule of every philosophy without exception in the *Auction*

of Lives. Of course the simple explanation of the puzzle is that he was a humourist first and a philosopher afterwards. Such preferences as he might have for any particular philosophical systems would not in the least have prevented him from sharpening his wit upon them, and might indeed have very likely induced him to give it a keener edge. He says of Alexander the Impostor, in his vivid sketch of that singular charlatan, that of all philosophers he hated Epicurus the most. ‘As well he might,’ adds Lucian, with honest warmth. ‘For with whom else should a juggler, a sham miracle-monger, and a truth-hater more rightly wage war than with Epicurus, the philosopher who has penetrated into things, and alone among men discovered their hidden truth?’ Yet the Epicurean in the *Auction of Lives* is knocked down for a couple of minæ—only a little more than eight pounds English! If it be asked how we know that this is a poor price for a philosopher, the answer is that Socrates is bought by Dio of Syracuse for four hundred and eighty-seven pounds ten shillings; that even Pythagoras, who is the most unmercifully ridiculed of all, goes for over forty pounds; and that if the Cyrenaic has to be ‘reserved,’ it is not so much because of the moral defects of his theory as because of the costliness of reducing it to practice. ‘You will have,’ says a half-intending bidder

candidly, 'to look about for a wealthier purchaser. I am simply not in a position to buy the "merry life" of this philosophy.' 'It looks, Zeus,' observes Hermes, 'as if this lot would remain on our hands.' 'Let him stand on one side,' replies the Father of gods and men promptly, 'and put up another.' Whereupon Democritus and Heraclitus take their places on the stand to be sold 'in one lot;' and as I find it impossible to get away from the *Auction of Lives* without an attempt at Englishing its excellent drolleries, I shall take leave to give a brief extract (freely paraphrased where the jest is untranslateable) from Lucian's report of the proceedings.

'*Hermes*. Come forward, if you please, you two. I have here two most excellent Lives to offer. We put them up as the wisest of them all.

'*Buyer*. Good heavens, what a contrast! One of them is continually laughing; while the other has apparently lost a friend, for he is as incessantly weeping. What does it all mean? You, sir, I am addressing. What are you laughing at?

'*Democritus*. What am I laughing at? What a question! Why, at the ridiculous human race and their ridiculous affairs.'

'*B.* What? You are laughing us and our affairs to scorn?

'*D.* Most assuredly. There is nothing serious about them. Vanity are they all: a rush of atoms through the infinite void.

'*B.* Vanity yourself! You and the infinite void you have got in your head. Still laughing, eh? What impudence! But you, my good sir, to whom it seems better to address myself,—what are you weeping for?

'*Heraclitus*. My friend, I regard all the affairs of men as miserable and tear-worthy, and wretched in their subjection to death. That is why I pity and weep over them. I have but a

small opinion of the present, and the future I regard as absolutely dreadful—a future of conflagration and cosmic catastrophe. I lament, too, that there is no fixity or stability anywhere, but that things are whirled round as if they were in a barley-stirabout—pain and pleasure, knowledge and ignorance, the great and the little, dancing up and down and changing places,—a sort of a puss-in-the-corner of Eternity.

‘*B.* What is Eternity?

‘*H.* Eternity? A schoolboy at play with his draught-board, or wrangling with his school-mates.

‘*B.* What then are men?

‘*H.* Men are mortal gods.

‘*B.* And gods?

‘*H.* Immortal men.

‘*B.* You repeat riddles, sir, or you are yourself an inventor of conundrums. You are as obscure as Apollo himself.

‘*H.* I care nothing for you.

‘*B.* Indeed. Then no sensible man will buy you.

‘*H.* Weep all of you, from youth upwards. Buyers or not, I adjure you all to weep.

‘*B.* This gentleman’s complaint does not widely differ from melancholy. I shall not buy either of them.

‘*Herm.* Again, an unsold lot!

‘*Zeus.* Put up another.’

And Socrates is then brought forward to be valued by Lucian (who certainly knew his Plato well, and must have admired him) with an amount of irreverence which would of itself suffice to show that there was no malice or even serious purpose in this particular jest.

And so, I am persuaded, it often is with Lucian. It is no doubt true enough that where the specific Polytheistic faith is a gross or demoralizing one, he

may have been inspired to his ridicule of it by some contemptuous indignation at the thought that the vulgar believed it; but in much the larger majority of cases there is no trace of any such feeling. This distinction is plainly to be seen in his dealing with the nether world. No doubt he was as desirous as Lucretius to discredit the belief in Hades as a place of material torment; as for instance in the curious dialogue between Menippus and Tantalus, in which the Cynic, after pointing out with admirable good sense to the Phrygian king that having no body he could not possibly thirst, proceeds to dispose of what were evidently contemporary efforts to spiritualize the meaning of the pagan legend. But when the myth was mere harmless poetry,—such for example as that of the Charon and his ferry-boat, of whom and which Lucian makes such continual fun,—it is unnecessary to suppose that the pleasantries were meant to be particularly hostile. It is indeed unlikely that a writer who had his Homer literally at his fingers' end, with a line from the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* ready for every possible occasion, and who dearly appreciated the poetic beauty of those immortal ballads, should, as some commentators would apparently have us believe, have deliberately set to work to bring the poet into contempt. Much more reasonable is it to suppose that it was simply the strong instinct of burlesque which impelled Lucian to bring

out for mere mirth's sake the anthropomorphic side of the religious legend, which he himself does not scruple to employ, allegorically of course, for the serious purposes of his often profound satire on the vanities of human life. He quite sees, for instance, as the *Charon* dialogue shows, how much might be made in the serious vein out of the old ferryman of the Styx ; but that does not prevent him from getting fun out of a matter-of-fact application of the legend which makes him receive a toll from the dead for ferrying them over, and represents him as ' in account with ' Mercury for goods supplied. The quaint commercial gravity of the short dialogue between the two on that subject could evidently have had no didactic afterthought of any kind.

' *Herm.* Let us go through our accounts, if you please, Mr. Ferryman, and see at once what you owe me, in order to prevent disputes hereafter.

' *Char.* Let us go through them, by all means, Hermes ; it will be better to ascertain them at once and save future trouble.

' *H.* Very well, then. To one anchor, procured by me to your order, five drachmæ.

' *Ch.* A stiff price !

' *H.* It's what I had to give, though, by Pluto ; five drachmæ, no less. Then the oar-thong, two obols.

' *Ch.* Right. Put down five drachmæ and two obols.

' *H.* And a darning-needle for the sail. That I had to give five obols for.

' *Ch.* Down with the five obols.

' *H.* And wax for stopping leaks, and nails, and the rope you made a brace of—two drachmæ the lot.

' *Ch.* Good ; you got those a bargain.

LUCIAN

‘*H.* Well, that is all, unless something has escaped my memory. And now, when are you going to pay up?’

‘*Ch.* At present, Hermes, I regret to say I am not in a position to do so. Times are too bad. If a good plague now, or a war, were to send me down a crowd of passengers, I might turn an honest penny on the whole number of them by cooking the accounts of the fares.

‘*H.* Then I suppose I must sit down and hope for the worst,—that I may get my debt paid out of these calamities.

‘*Ch.* I am afraid there is no help for it. You see yourself what business is like: how few arrivals there are. These are the piping times of peace.

‘*H.* Well, ‘tis better so, even if it does somewhat delay the payment of my debt. But think of the old times, Charon. You remember in what sort of plight the men of those days used to come down to us—sturdy fellows all, bathed in blood most of them, or riddled with wounds. But nowadays it is some one who has been dosed out of the world by a wife or a son, or who has swollen himself to death, by way of stomach and lips, with glut-tony—pallid miserable wretches, not to compare with their fore-fathers. Most of them, to judge by their appearance, find their way here through plotting to get each other’s money.

‘*Ch.* Yes, ‘tis an article in considerable request.

‘*H.* To be sure; but how then could you blame me if I were sternly to demand payment of my debt?’

The iconoclastic satirist—the writer who sets himself to ‘sap a creed,’ whether ‘solemn’ or not, even with a sneer which is not solemn but lively—is not as a rule a very attractive personality. Many worthy people, quite capable of admiring his extraordinary and many-sided genius, have never succeeded in taking Voltaire thoroughly to their hearts. Even the tolerant Charles Lamb admitted just so much want of sympathy with the brilliant Frenchman as is im-

plied in the remark that he would not care to 'read *Candide* in a church.' But I cannot understand anyone reading the works of Lucian—dialogues, rhetorical exercises, burlesques, romance, or what not—intelligently and appreciatively, and feeling anything of that kind of half-repugnance which, even while he dazzles, the scoffer at the religious weaknesses of his fellows excites in so many minds. To my thinking he is saved from that by a thorough geniality of humour which in most of the scoffers, and in the very greatest of them all, is almost or altogether wanting. No one, I should think, could read the charming little autobiographical sketch which he has left us in the *Dream* (would that many another by many another hand of ancient times had been written and had survived!) without feeling attracted to the man who wrote it. The touch is so light, the style so frank and unaffected, that one cannot imagine the author to have been other than a good fellow.

Lucian adds another to that tolerably numerous list of great names in literature whose owners had been destined in the parental counsels for quite a different walk in life. His account of this matter is delightful. He was the son of parents in poor circumstances, and when he had reached his fifteenth year his father was advised by friends of the family, officious in all ages, to take him from school and apprentice him to his uncle, a statuary—probably not

in a very flourishing way of business, but who at any rate, as did many more distinguished artists then and since, combined the profession of the sculptor with something like the handicraft of a working mason—the scheme was thought the more hopeful because the youth was supposed to have shown a turn for art. In his play hours, he says, ‘I had been accustomed to model oxen, horses, or even, heaven save the mark! men, out of wax, and as my father thought, cleverly. I was caned for my performances by my master, but still they obtained me the praise of native genius, and my plastic dexterity raised good hopes that I should speedily master my art.’ To his maternal the uncle’s studio or workshop accordingly was little Lucian sent, thinking with what pride he would bear himself before his school-fellows when he could model gods, or portraits of himself or of whomsoever he pleased among them. His uncle began by giving him a chisel, and bidding him use it gently on a marble slab before him, sententiously delivering himself at the same time of the gnome that the ‘beginning is half of the whole.’ The beginning in the youthful apprentice’s case was more than half of the whole: it was the whole itself. Bearing too hard upon the instrument, Lucian broke the slab which he had been set to polish, and the indignant statuary caught up a leathern thong which lay near him, and administered chastisement in ‘no very mildly per-

susative manner, so that tears were my introduction to art. I ran home choking with sobs, and overflowing with tears; and there I recited the pathetic story of the thong and showed my stripes, and complained of the great cruelty of my uncle,' adding (this is a delicious touch), 'that it was due to his envious fear of my excelling him in his art. My indignant mother heaped reproaches upon her brother, and I retired still in tears to my bed, there to pass a night of sleepless cogitation.'

Thus far, continues Lucian, who evidently composed and delivered the *Dream* as a lecture, perhaps to an audience of his own fellow-citizens of Samosata, after his return from his travels, 'I have been recounting to you merely ridiculous and boyish incidents; but what follows, gentlemen, [the $\omega\acute{a}\nu\delta\rho\epsilon s$ stamps the character of the piece,] is not to be as lightly accounted.' And what does follow is the finely-told story of a vision, in which Paideia and Technè (Learning and Handicraft) contend for him like Virtue and Vice for Hercules in the Fable of Prodicus. Handicraft was 'dressed in artisan's garb, a masculine-looking, shock-headed, horny-handed creature, covered with marble dust, like my uncle at the stone-polishing work.' Her rival was fair to look upon, graceful of figure and comely of dress. Handicraft, who is the first to address Lucian, warns him not to condemn her for her squalid appearance, 'since

from such beginnings came Phidias who revealed Zeus to the world, and Polycletus who wrought the Hera, and the much-praised Myron and Praxiteles the wonderful—men who are now honoured next to the gods.’ Learning, however, reminds him that everybody cannot be a Phidias or a Praxiteles, and that even those who admire the art of those masters do not envy them the actual practice of their calling; and Learning wins the day. Lucian quitted the workshop for ever, and rose, as he tells his audience, to fame and fortune by letters. And he concludes his lecture with the moral, possibly of doubtful wisdom in those days as in these, that youth should always follow the supposed bent of its genius, and with the moral no more doubtful in those days than in these, that the mere dread of poverty ought not alone to be sufficient to deter him from following it.

From the date of this fortunate accident at his uncle’s—how thankful we ought to be that the marble slab was not a little more tough, or the leathern thong a little less so!—until some thirty years later, that is to say from about 135 A.D. to about 165 A.D., Lucian led the wandering life of the sophistes, or paid rhetorician, of those days. In his twentieth year, or four years after quitting his native Syria, he seems to have visited Greece, and to have made the acquaintance of the Platonic philosopher Nigrinus, who gives

the title to one of the dialogues. Other passages from his writings—for it is, of course, from these alone that our scanty knowledge of his life has been built up—show that he practised for some time at the bar in Antioch, but abandoned the profession of the law in disgust at the dishonesty of its practitioners; that he visited Rome in about his thirtieth year; that from Italy he passed into Southern Gaul, where he remained to exercise his calling of rhetorician, or public lecturer, for some ten years; that thence he returned to his native place; and that finally, about the age of forty-five, he migrated with the surviving members of his family to Athens, where he passed nearly the whole of the remainder of his life. All that is further known of him is the curious and interesting fact that at an advanced age his circumstances became reduced; that he was only saved from poverty by the timely interference of some imperial patron—which of the Roman emperors it was is not quite certain—and that the most famous writer of his age and country died a judicial sinecurist. He was appointed to the clerkship or registrarship of the law-courts of Alexandria, the duties of which office he delegated to a deputy, so that he was enabled to spend the remainder of his life in comfort at Athens.

His defence of himself was characteristic. He had in one of his earlier satirical pieces somewhat bitterly criticized those of his order who accepted the posi-

tion of salaried dependent in the houses of the rich ; and after accepting the sinecure office from the Emperor he composed an *Apology*, addressed to his friend Sabinus, in which he pointed out how very different a case was his from that of those whom he had assailed with his satire.

‘ In my present capacity,’ he argues, ‘ I remain an independent man ; while my public office is one of great honour and authority. Practically I administer a large share of the Imperial government in Egypt. I grant judicial decrees. I fix the order of judicial proceedings, and see to the keeping of their records. I arrange and regulate the pleadings of litigants, and I look after the registration and faithful prosecution of the edicts of the Sovereign. Further you must remember that my emoluments come to me not from a private individual, but from the Emperor, and that they are very handsome ; and that the post gives good hopes of leading to further advancement.’

And he humorously goes on to argue that since the Emperor himself did not scruple to receive very splendid *douceurs* in the shape of dedicatory shrines and statues, and other material as well as moral forms of gratification, over and above the regular revenues, a humble citizen might certainly be excused for following his example at a properly respectful distance.

Lucian, as his latest translator observes—and it is another point of justification for the well-worn comparison between him and Voltaire—displayed an extraordinary versatility of talent. ‘ He is almost encyclopædic,’ says one of his translators, ‘ in the

extent and rarity of his productions. He was critic, moralist, philosopher, politician, poet, romancist, litterateur.' It is strange that Mr. Williams should have left out the title by which he is the best known to posterity—that of satirist ; and indeed to the classification of 'romancist' he might have added with but a slight deviation from technical accuracy that of dramatist also, for Lucian's dramatic gift is assuredly conspicuous in all his dialogues. His *personæ* are not, as Landor's in most cases almost avowedly and designedly were, mere mouthpieces for the exposition of his own views. They are almost always distinct and individualized. Examples of this abound in the Dialogues of the Gods : an excellent instance of it appearing in the scene between Hermes, Paris, and the three goddesses who compete for the prize of beauty. Nothing could be more delicate and skilful than the discrimination with which the varying characters of the three divine ladies are hit off. The spiteful jealousy of Hera is particularly well brought out in her apparently innocent suggestion, on reaching Mount Ida, that Aphrodite should go first and show the way, having familiarized herself, 'they *do* say,' with the locality by her frequent visits to Anchises. Much of the same power of dramatic characterization is displayed in the exceedingly droll colloquy between Zeus and Hera on the subject of the misconduct of Ixion, a piece in which a con-

temporary critic has well noted 'the admirable distinction of the reprobate masculine humour of one speaker from the feminine, though highly creditable, incapacity to appreciate humour in the latter.' Lucian's highest effort of comedy, however, is his *Zeus the Tragedian*—the scene of the meeting convened by the uneasy father of the gods to consider the grave question of the decline in mortal reverence which the Olympian family had recently undergone, and the best measures to be taken for stemming the tide of infidelity. The deeper satire of the piece is excellent, but not less so in its way is the broad Aristophanic fun of the ceremony of convocation and of the arrangement of the delicate question of precedence. Hermes, as master of the ceremonies, as well as usher (a sort of combination of Gold Stick and Black Rod) is directed by Zeus to seat the gods as they arrive, according to rank as fixed either by material or art: the Golden in the front rank, the Silver next, then the Ivory, and lastly the Bronze and Marble ones. Among these last art might be taken into account, and precedence was to be given to the gods of Phidias, Alcamenes, Myron and Euphranor; but the tag-rag and bob-tail, who have no pretensions either to beauty of workmanship or intrinsic value, are to take back seats, and be content to figure as silent members. Upon this follows an admirable bit of character. Mercury, as the patron of art, cannot

readily bring himself to assign such importance to mere material costliness. How, he asks, if some of these many hundred-weighted golden fellows be of wretched workmanship, out of taste and proportion, glaringly vulgar and plebeian? Are they to have the *pas* of the bronzes of Myron, Polycletus, and Phidias, and the marbles of Alcamenes? Or should not art by rights have the precedence? ‘By rights, yes,’ replies Jupiter; ‘but still,’ he adds, like the thorough man of the world he is, ‘it must be given to gold.’ This double-edged stroke of satire, which at once hits an ignoble trait in human character and the common weakness of anthropomorphism in all human religions, is delivered by a master-hand.

Lucian’s intimate and at the same time genially tolerant knowledge of human nature is indeed conspicuous throughout his writings, and in none more so, perhaps, than in the *Hetæric Dialogues*. The gallery of female portraits through which one passes in the series of conversations is not exactly an edifying one, but only one or two of its presentments are properly speaking unpresentable. For the rest it is an extremely interesting procession, in which one hardly knows whether to admire more the force and truth with which Lucian has set forth some of the eternal generic types of female character, or the skill with which he has contrived to discriminate, through a series of no fewer than fifteen dialogues, between

their specific illustrations. The lightness of touch which he displays in these portions of his work he owed no doubt in some measure to his training and practice as a rhetorician. His purely rhetorical exercises (mere *fantasias*, of course, as they now and then are) are still worthy of study as something more than mere old-world literary curiosities. We need not suppose with Wieland that his *Encomium on a Fly* was an impromptu recitation in order to feel plenty of admiration for the grace and spirit with which the little trifle is worked out.

It is of course, however, unnecessary to say that on this side of Lucian's encyclopædic genius he is naturally the furthest removed from modern sympathies. Nowadays we have nothing like—or at any rate nothing avowedly, even if we have anything intentionally, like—the rhetorical exercise of a travelling lecturer of the second century of the Christian era. It is extinct as a literary form; and of course the place of an ancient writer in modern estimation will be fixed by the work which he has left behind him in those forms which have proved imperishable. In such forms, however, lies the bulk of Lucian's work. It is in satire—the department of his productions which Mr. Williams has so singularly omitted to specify in the foregoing list—that Lucian has most clearly established his claim to a place among the great writers of all time: not

of course in theological satire alone, or even principally, though it is to that branch of his satiric work that most attention has been given by the world at large, and perhaps even by the narrower world of scholars. For though he lives and will live as a satirist in all acceptations, particular as well as general, of the term, he will not live so surely, or at any rate not so justly, for his witty raillery at a dying superstition, as for the broad philosophic disdain with which he contemplates human life in the man. His topics are of course and necessarily those which have been the commonplaces of satire in all ages—the vanity of wealth and power, the self-torment of avarice and ambition, the folly and pretension of human philosophies, the dream-stuff of life itself. Every satirist that ever lived has had his say on these matters; but it is only a few of the very greatest who have handled them with such command as Lucian. His eye and hand are unerring. It matters not what is the dramatic stand-point which for the moment he has selected. It matters not whether, as in the *Icaro-Menippus*, he gazes down from his airy height on this swarming ant-hill of humanity; or whether, as in the Dialogues of the under-world, he looks up at us through the purged eyes of the dead; there is always the Shakespearean breadth of vision though not of course the Shakespearean finality of touch. One of the masterpieces in satire of this widely-

reaching order is his *Timon the Misanthrope*—a piece which is doubly interesting from the fact of its dealing with a subject which has been also treated, if only perhaps as a reconstruction of the work of others, by Shakespeare himself. Whence Shakespeare took his Timon is doubtful, and whether the play which bears that name was founded upon and contains the inferior matter of some other dramatists, we know not; but one thing is certain, that the Timon of Shakespeare is not that mere vulgar Thersites, the Timon of Plutarch, and that it is, at least in many of its more striking and dignified traits, the Timon of Lucian. There is little or no probability of Shakespeare's having seen Lucian's Dialogue, even in a translation; but the coincidences of action alone between the dialogue and the drama are far too remarkable to be fortuitous. The Dialogue opens, indeed, with the very second scene of Act iv., where the ruined Timon is discovered digging; and though there is a strong dash of Lucian's habitual burlesque in his hero's bitterly ironical invocation of Zeus, the note of seriousness is struck almost immediately afterwards, and is maintained to the end. The response of the father to the noisy outcry of this beggared dupe of the sycophant and the sponge has a certain Olympian majesty about it. 'Who is this, Hermes, that shouts to us thus out of Attica from beside the base of Hymettus? Yon

squalid wretch in the garment of skins. See ! he who stoops as though to dig. A prating fellow that, and a daring one ; some philosopher belike ; for no one else would have vented such a torrent of impious words !' Hermes replies that it is Timon the son of Echecratides, the rich man who once feasted them with so many hecatombs, but who had been brought to ruin by the parasites upon whom he had wasted his wealth.

' Whilst these vultures were preying upon his liver, he thought them his best friends, and that they fed upon him out of pure love and affection. But they, after having picked his bones accurately clean, and diligently sucked out any marrow they could find in him, took their departure, leaving him withered and cut down to the very roots, and, so far from assisting him in their turn, declined either to recognize or look at him—for why should they ? Thus it is that, spade in hand, and in skin garments, he digs for hire, ashamed to show himself in the city, and melancholy mad with his troubles ; since those who have fattened on him now pass him haughtily by, as though they knew not his very name, whether it be Timon or no.'

Jupiter then resolves to despatch Hermes and Plutus to bestow new wealth on Timon—a command which the god of riches very reluctantly obeys, urging that if he returns to the spendthrift he will only become once more the prey of parasites and courtesans. On their way to earth the two gods discuss mankind and their employment of wealth in a vein of the keenest satire ; and, reaching Timon at last, they find him working with his spade, in com-

pany with Labour, Wisdom, and Courage—attendants, according to their invariable wont, in the train of Poverty. Poverty, on learning their errand, complains bitterly.

‘Would you take from me,’ she asks, ‘the man whom I received from Luxury in such miserable plight, and whom I handed over to Labour and Wisdom to turn into the man of dignity and worth that you behold? Are you, Plutus, to rob me of him, and to give him back again to Arrogance and Vanity, in order that they may reconvert him into the creature of effeminacy and folly that he was before, and that yet again he may return to me, this time a worthless rag?’

Timon, however, rejects the offer which Plutus makes him, and the gods leave him, desiring him to continue digging. He does so, and finds gold; and the fine outburst of cynicism with which he greets the discovery should be compared with the parallel passage in Shakespeare (Act iv., sc. 3), in which the same incident occurs, if we want to appreciate at once the resemblance between the Timons of Lucian and Shakespeare, and the difference between his two delineators in point of imaginative wealth. It is clear that the incident of the gold-finding, and of the insults which the finder heaps upon his returning parasites, must have been derived by Shakespeare from some writer or other who had seen the Timon of Lucian; and no less clear is it to all who can recognize Shakespeare’s hand that none other man, living or dead, could have helped him to the fiercely

passionate rhapsody which follows. Lucian had nothing, of course, of Shakespeare's torrent-flow of imagination. The thought of the discovered treasure does not bring all the multitudinous powers of gold in a rush of imagery before his eyes. Lucian's Timon turns at once to the thought of the use that he will make of it in gratifying his eternal enmity towards his race; but the passage is one of great power and even solemnity, and may stand as one of the finest specimens of Lucian's serious manner.

‘ I will purchase the whole of this sequestered spot, and hereon I will build me a tower, to keep my gold, to house myself and none other, and to serve me for a tomb when I am dead. And from thenceforth let my rule and law of life be this: To shun all men, to know no man, to despise all; to treat the name of friend, of guest, of comrade, of the shrine of Pity herself, as an empty sound. Let compassion for the unhappy, or succour for the needy, be as the violation of law, and as the dissolution of morals. Be my life solitary as the wolf's, and Timon alone be Timon's friend. Let all other men be to me as foes and betrayers. Let converse with them be pollution; and the sight of them make the day accursed.’

And in this strain he runs on in a sort of grim parody of the style of his *Psephisma*, winding up with a ‘decreed by us, Timon the son of Echecratides, and confirmed by us the aforesaid Timon of the deme of Colyttos.’ He goes on to declare, almost in the very words quoted with too painful a suspicion of a false quantity by Shakespeare, that the name by which he would most like to be called is that of *misan-*

LUCIAN

thropos. But the whole dialogue should, as I have said, be read together with the play; and, if the comparison leaves the eminence of the great Master of all time as unapproachable as ever, it can nevertheless hardly fail to show (and this is all that can ever be shown of any man) that more than one, or even two, of the Master's vast array of gifts was possessed, and in no insignificant measure, by Lucian of Samosata.

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

A BOSWELLIAN FRAGMENT

Some days ago I accepted for Dr. Johnson and myself an invitation to a London spirit-party, at which a very distinguished author was to be among the corporeal guests. It was with some uneasiness that I announced this to my revered friend, as hitherto I had been always accustomed to take his pleasure on the matter before making any engagement of the kind. At first, as I feared, he took it very much amiss. ‘Sir,’ he said, ‘you have permitted yourself to use an unwarrantable freedom. Why did you accept for me?’ BOSWELL: ‘I imagined, sir, that I was sufficiently acquainted with your tastes to justify me in assuming that this visit to my friend would be agreeable to you.’ JOHNSON: ‘Sir, the event itself shows that you were mistaken, as people commonly are who act upon “imaginings”’

(blowing with derision) 'as though they were reasoned beliefs. Sir, the very word you employ convicts you of levity and officiousness.' BOSWELL: 'You used to be well pleased to dine with our friend Mr. Dilly, the bookseller, in the Poultry, where we met many literary persons.' JOHNSON: 'Well, sir, and what of that? This gentleman you speak of is no friend of Mr. Dilly's, nor have I met him before.' BOSWELL: 'True, sir; but I thought that as you were formerly not averse from the company of authors, you might be amused by again meeting one of them.' JOHNSON (testily): 'And so, sir, you might argue that because I had a liking for roast veal and stuffing, I should have an equal relish for apple-pie and custard. Sir, you are talking at random. Authors are not like peas in a pod, and, if some of them are civil and clubbable men, we are not to suppose that all are so.' I was casting about for other excuses with which to mollify him, but he cut me short. 'Nay, sir,' he said, 'let us deal plainly with each other. You wished to accept the invitation because you had a curiosity to meet the gentleman, and you father your own inclinations upon me.'

I saw from the humour he was in that it would be better to drop the subject for the time, in the expectation that when the day of our engagement arrived, he would recur to it of his own accord, and in a more compliant mood. Of this I was not disap-

pointed, for when the day came he said, in a sudden way: 'Well, sir, are we not going to your friend's?' To this I replied that I was myself ready and willing, and should like nothing better; but that the least I could do to atone for my unfortunate misapprehension of his wishes was to make quite sure of them now, and that I had merely been waiting for some indication of their direction. JOHNSON (smiling): 'I see, sir, that you are determined to make an accomplice of me. Well, let us go.' Here I saw my opportunity for appealing to his love of controversy. 'I beg, sir,' I said, 'that you will not consider yourself under any obligation to fulfil this unauthorised engagement which I have made for you. Pray look upon yourself as released from it.' JOHNSON: 'How can I do that, sir, without permission, and what right have you to permit me? The right is your friend's, and he has given you no more authority to release me than I gave you to bind me. Sir, you are seeking to make amends for one freedom by committing another.' BOSWELL: 'But surely, sir, it is not possible that an undertaking given in your name, but without your sanction, can impose upon you any liability to discharge it.' JOHNSON: 'Why not, sir? It happens every day in the City of London. You have forgot the maxim, *Fieri non debet, factum valet*. Your friend may well suppose that I have given you a general authority to accept invitations for me, and that I

have specially revoked it in his case. I should not like the dog to think that we have no manners here. Come, sir, let us go.'

His argumentative victory had so pleased him that he started on his journey in high good humour ; but before we reached my friend's house I saw that a change had come over him. I believe he was vexed by the informality of the invitation, now that he had time to reflect upon it, and came prepared to stand on his dignity. He was certainly in his gruffest mood when the Eminent Author, whose name I think it better to conceal, was brought forward to be introduced to him.

The conversation, to which I listened very attentively, began thus: THE AUTHOR: 'Dr. Johnson, your most obedient servant.' JOHNSON: 'Who are you, sir?' THE AUTHOR: 'I am a humble soldier in the army of which you were the illustrious commander. My weapons are those which, in your powerful hand—' JOHNSON: 'Nay, sir, I asked for neither flatteries nor figures of speech. A plain answer to a plain question will serve me well enough. Are you a writer of books?' THE AUTHOR: 'That is indeed my calling.' JOHNSON: 'Then, sir, I wish you joy of it. It was a beggarly trade in my day, and many a man who plied it had better left it alone. But you, at any rate, seem to have prospered at it. There are no holes in your coat, and you do not look as if

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

you had often had to go without your dinner.' THE AUTHOR (complacently): ' 'Tis true, sir, I have been prosperous enough. My last book has just reached its fiftieth thousand.' JOHNSON: 'Sir, you surprise me. Either the sales of all books must be vastly larger than ever I remember, or you must be the most admired writer of your time, or indeed of all time.' THE AUTHOR: 'You offer me an embarrassing choice of alternatives, Dr. Johnson; and, unfortunately, honesty rejects the one which modesty would prefer. I cannot truthfully say that the sales of all books are larger than you remember them.' JOHNSON: 'Is it an epic, sir?' THE AUTHOR: 'Some of my friends are good enough to call it a prose epic.' JOHNSON: 'A prose epic! Not like Mr. Macpherson's *Ossian*, I trust.' THE AUTHOR: 'No, indeed, it is a work of fiction.' JOHNSON: 'So, in my opinion, was Mr. Macpherson's *Ossian*. But doubtless you may mean a romance, sir, like my own *Rasselas*.'

The gentleman seemed rather discomposed, I thought, at the comparison, and I judged it time to come to his assistance. 'Perhaps, sir,' I said, 'Mr. _____'s romance is of a less philosophical cast than your history of the Prince of Abyssinia.' JOHNSON: 'Nay, sir, let the gentleman speak for himself. Why trouble us with your "perhaps this," and "perhaps t'other"? You are wasting our time over conjec-

tures, when if you would only be silent for a moment, we should learn the facts. Was your romance a love-story, sir?' THE AUTHOR: 'It was; a story of love and of betrayal.' JOHNSON: 'I surmised as much. A tale after the manner of Dr. Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, I suppose?' Here the gentleman again seemed a little in doubt, but, after a short pause, he replied that, with allowances for differences of treatment, the tale was one of the same kind. JOHNSON (laughing and rolling about): 'And you tell me, sir, that the booksellers have sold fifty thousand copies of this history of Jenny and Jessamy? Pray, sir, at what price?' THE AUTHOR: 'The published price is six shillings.' JOHNSON: Six shillings only! Then I conclude it must be a little book.' The author, however, assured him that that was not the case. It was at least three times the length of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. At this Dr. Johnson was greatly surprised, being unable, as he said, to understand how so large a book could be sold at such a price and return a profit. 'Why, sir,' he inquired, 'what in the world does it cost to produce it?' The gentleman replied, a shilling.. JOHNSON: 'What, and sells for six?' THE AUTHOR: 'No, sir, six shillings is but the published price, as it is called. The price to the purchaser is only some four shillings and sixpence.' JOHNSON: 'Be it so, sir; but that leaves still a handsome profit to the bookseller. Why, sir, if the fellow does all his busi-

ness on those terms he must roll in wealth.' THE AUTHOR: 'It is not all clear profit to him, but he does very well.'

The conversation here shifted for a time to other topics, but I could see that my illustrious friend was still revolving in his mind the strange particulars he had just heard, and that he was, above all, curious to know what could have been the author's gains from this marvellous book. I therefore had the temerity to say: 'There is a question, sir, which I see Dr. Johnson wishes to ask you; but he is afraid to do so for fear of appearing uncivil. He would like to know what was the sum paid you for the book.' I confess I put this question with no little trepidation, and held myself prepared for a terrible rebuke; but to my great relief the Sage took my interference in excellent part. 'Sir,' said he, smiling, 'when you become better acquainted with Mr. Boswell, you will find that it is his common practice to impute his own weaknesses to me. But I own that, in this case, I keep him in countenance. It would interest me much to hear what the bookseller paid you for so vastly successful a work.' The author not at once replying, Dr. Johnson added: 'I trust the rogue did not get it too cheap.' BOSWELL: 'Dr. Goldsmith, sir, only got sixty guineas for the *Vicar of Wakefield*.' JOHNSON: 'What of that, sir? Beggars cannot be choosers, and poor Goldy was in great straits when I found him a

purchaser for his book.' BOSWELL: 'But the purchaser, sir! Ought any man to take advantage of another in that situation?' JOHNSON: 'Sir, what matters whether he ought or not? We know that, as man is constituted, he usually will, and the spend-thrift whose necessities place him at the mercy of others should blame his own improvidence, not their cupidity. But you, sir,' (turning to the author,) 'can have had no necessities for cupidity to prey upon. I trust you did not part with your romance for less than a hundred pounds?'

Here a gentleman of the company, who had been listening to the talk with evident signs of amusement, could contain himself no longer, and burst out a-laughing. JOHNSON (sternly): 'Sir, this ill-timed merriment is mighty offensive. What was it in my last speech that you are pleased to find ridiculous?' The gentleman, much alarmed, made haste to assure Dr. Johnson that he meant no offence, and was laughing, not so much at anything that had been said, as at his own thoughts. JOHNSON (somewhat mollified, but unwilling to let the gentleman go without another rub): 'For aught I know, sir, your thoughts may deserve to be laughed at for their absurdity; but' (smiling) 'if it is their wit that tickles you, I think you should share them with the company.' THE GENTLEMAN (vastly relieved by the Sage's return to good humour): 'With all my heart, though

I cannot claim the merit of wit for them. I happen for my sins, or those of other people, to be a bookseller, and I was laughing to myself at the thought of what our successful authors would say if we paid them as we did in your days.' JOHNSON: 'O ho! sir, you are a bookseller, are you? Then you will be able to check Mr. ——'s accounts for us: at least, when he renders them, which he seems somewhat loth to do.' THE AUTHOR: 'Not at all, Dr. Johnson, not at all, I assure you. I consider the labourer worthy of his hire. I receive a modest royalty of five-and-twenty per cent., thirteen copies as twelve.' JOHNSON: 'Sir, I do not catch your meaning.' The gentleman who had described himself as a bookseller explained that the royalty spoken of was a percentage on the published price of each copy sold, with the exception of one in every thirteen, on which no royalty is paid. THE AUTHOR: 'It came to one and fourpence-halfpenny a copy.'

Dr. Johnson receiving this information in silence, the author, after a few moments, observed, somewhat anxiously, 'I hope, sir, you do not consider that as otherwise than a modest sum. But you say nothing.' JOHNSON (something impatiently): 'Sir, I wish you would follow my example for a moment, if you desire me to answer your questions. You mistake the silence of computation for the reticence of dissent. I was reckoning the profits of this love-story of yours,

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

and I find' (he added, after a few moments,) 'that they come to near three thousand five hundred pounds.' THE AUTHOR: 'Well, sir, is that sum an exorbitant one?' JOHNSON: 'Why, no, sir. It is large, but we are to consider things in their relations. There was a very large sum to be divided.' THE AUTHOR: 'Then you would not accuse me of unbridled greed for demanding and obtaining this share of the sum so divisible?' JOHNSON: 'No, sir. Let us not wrest language from its natural meaning. He only is greedy who grasps at a larger share of anything than he can justly claim. The bookseller, I suppose, was a free agent; and, if so, in agreeing to your claim, he admitted its justice.' BOSWELL: 'But might he not agree to it, sir, for reasons of his own, yet without considering it just?' JOHNSON: 'I do not think so. How can it be unjust for one man to strike a bargain with another, which each judges to be to his advantage? Moreover, the event showed that each judged rightly. The sale of Mr. —'s romance at four shillings and sixpence, after it had cost but a shilling to print and bind, left three shillings and sixpence to be divided between the author and the bookseller. If the author's share of this was one shilling and fourpence-halfpenny, there must have remained for the bookseller a profit of two shillings and three-halfpence on each volume—surely a very pretty sum.'

Seeing that the bookseller was again hard put to it to restrain his laughter, Johnson turned to him and said good-humouredly, 'I see that either I or this gentleman's thoughts have again been fortunate enough to amuse him. If it be his thoughts, I hope he will once more entertain us with them.' THE BOOKSELLER: 'I wish, sir, you would ask Mr. — whether his bookseller—or, as he and I should call him, his publisher—drew two shillings and three-halfpence of profit per copy from the sale of his last novel.' JOHNSON: 'Nay, sir, ask him yourself, or tell us without asking him, since it is pretty evident that you know.' But the author here interposed, and admitted of his own accord that his publisher's profit on the book had not amounted to more than elevenpence a copy. JOHNSON: 'Then pray, sir, what becomes of the rest of the money?' THE AUTHOR: 'Sir, it is sweated away as it passes through the hands of middlemen. The London publisher, or bookseller, as you would have called him, passes it on to some great wholesale bookseller or other, and by the time it reaches the country bookshop there is nothing left but a beggarly shred of profit for the last seller.'

As I saw that the bookseller was listening to this with much impatience, and with many signs of a desire to speak, I endeavoured to obtain a hearing for him by interrupting Mr. — with the words,

‘Sir, the gentleman wishes to be heard. Pray, sir, give the gentleman leave.’ Dr. Johnson, however, seemed nettled at my interference, and rapped out smartly: ‘Nay, sir, give *this* gentleman leave. Mr. —, as I judge, is relating facts within his own experience, and that is a relation which no one else is qualified to correct. I conclude that he is going on to tell us why the seller of his book took it at all from the man through whose hands it last passed if he could not resell it at a reasonable profit, or why he did not clap so much on to the last price as would repay him.’ The author assured us that this was impossible, because of the active competition of others in the trade who would undersell and ruin him if he attempted such a thing. JOHNSON: ‘Then why, sir, does he not buy direct of the bookseller who printed the work? Why should he let any wholesale dealer come between them?’ THE AUTHOR: ‘That, sir, would in fact be competing with the wholesale dealer, and he has not the capital for such a venture.’ JOHNSON: ‘Sir, if that is so, he had better quit bookselling and shift his money to some other concern.’ THE AUTHOR: ‘Surely, sir, he has a right to live and thrive on this business which his father before him found at least profitable enough to subsist upon. The publisher should take care that the book reaches him at a price which will afford him what we now call “a living wage.” I have before

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

this stipulated with my publisher as part of my own agreement with him that the country bookseller should get my book on such terms as will afford him a decent margin of profit on the sales.' JOHNSON : 'Vastly well indeed, sir. Of course, if you choose out of charity to forego a part of your own profits (perhaps the fourpence-halfpenny over the shilling on each copy) in order that a worthy man may be supported in a trade that he cannot make a living at, you can do so, and there's an end on't.'

Here, for some reason or other, the company fell silent. The bookseller seemed to be again so much diverted with his own thoughts and with watching the author (who appeared to me mighty uneasy) as to have lost all his former inclination to speak. The conversation, moreover, was becoming rather tedious to myself, and I wished, if I could, to give it an impulse in some new direction. I therefore turned to the bookseller, and inquired the meaning of an expression which had fallen from one of the company before our talk about bookselling had begun. Who and what, I asked, was the New Woman? Seeing that the gentleman hesitated a little, Johnson said, pleasantly enough : 'You see, sir, that Mr. Boswell's habit of curiosity still survives. But the term which perplexes him is one I have never heard ; nor should I readily believe that there is anything in nature corresponding to it.' THE BOOKSELLER : 'What, sir,

you think a New Woman an impossibility?' JOHNSON: 'Why, yes, sir, to be sure. Man himself has changed but infinitesimally in the course of ages, and woman, in whom the primitive instincts are necessarily stronger, changes with still more difficulty.' BOSWELL: 'What do you say, sir, to the *Varium et mutabile* of Virgil?' JOHNSON: 'Nay, sir, you should finish your quotation before asking me what I say to it. It is *varium et mutabile SEMPER femina*. What do you say to the *semper*? The poet is on my side, not yours. What he ascribes to woman is an immutable mutability. He says in effect of her that she is constant to her inconstancy, an unchanging type of change.'

I was not convinced nor, I think, was the bookseller by the reply of Johnson's, who here, as in other instances, seemed to me to be merely talking for an argumentative victory. But the author, who had remained silent, and who seemed to me to be reflecting with more and more disquiet on the remark Johnson had last addressed to him, here broke in, a little abruptly, with the question, 'Why, sir, should the publisher exist at all?' Johnson, who never relished such sudden interruptions of a conversation in which he was interested, answered him something shortly: 'I thought we were done with your business, sir. We cannot be for ever talking of you and your wonderful book.' The author, however, seemed in

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

no wise dashed by the Sage's reproof, but continued to enlarge upon what was evidently the favourite subject, with increasing vehemence of manner. 'Why should we not deal directly with the country bookseller, and squeeze out the publisher altogether? Only two parties are necessary to the production of a book: the man who makes it, and the man who sells it to the public. The publisher is a modern invention, or rather a late and superfluous growth. He is a mere excrescence, a wart, a wen. He did not exist in England even as recently as your own day, Dr. Johnson. Authors then talked of writing for the booksellers, not for the publishers.' JOHNSON: 'Why, sir, what stuff is this? How did Mr. Cave, or Mr. Cadell, or Mr. Millar, or Mr. Dodsley differ from the men you now call publishers? It is true we talked of writing for the booksellers: but the book had to be made before it could be sold, and the one bookseller who made it to be sold by himself and other booksellers answered to your publisher. Do you say there is no need for him?' THE AUTHOR: 'No, sir. I repeat that only two parties are necessary to the production of a book: the man who makes it, and the man who sells it to the public.' JOHNSON: 'Yes, sir, I hear you repeat it. Like many other disputants you are content with merely repeating what it is your business to elucidate and defend. Let me observe, however, that you do not state your own case

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

accurately, or as favourably for yourself as you might. You say that two parties are necessary to the production of a book, and you set about to prove it by adding that it takes one man to produce the book and another to sell it, which is a wholly different operation. 'Why, sir,' (laughing), 'this is to talk like the urchin who said that currant pie was of two kinds —currant pie, and currant-and-raspberry pie.'

I saw that Johnson had put himself into good humour by his jest, so I thought it well to interpose no remark of my own. But the author, thinking to trip up my venerable friend in his talk, exclaimed rather loudly: 'Be it so, sir; I accept your estimate. Let me say that only one man is required.' JOHNSON: 'Let us say no such thing, sir. The estimate, as you call it, is none of mine. I did but correct yours in order to reduce it *ad absurdum*. For what can be more absurd than to say that even to the production of a book but one man is necessary—the man who makes it. Is it then made by one man, and that man the author, or is it to be so made in future? Is the writer of the book to make the paper on which it is printed, and to set up the type, and to bind the volumes?' THE AUTHOR: 'No, sir, I do not mean that. I should, perhaps, have used the word "distribution" instead of the word "production." It is in the distribution of a book that the publisher is, in my opinion, unnecessary. To that process there are,

I maintain, but two necessary parties: the author and the bookseller. Why should not the author send his book direct from the printer and bookbinder to the shop of the bookseller? A business representative, a clerk, a cashier, is all he would want for such a purpose?' JOHNSON: 'Does a book then drop down from heaven ready printed and bound? If not, how is it to be got into the hands of the printer and bookbinder? Is the author's clerk, his cashier, to do this business for him, too? Is he to make his contract with the paper-maker for the paper, and with the printer for the printing, and with the binder for the binding? Why, sir, at that rate every author will have to keep a counting-house of his own, with all its apparatus, and will have to spend more hours at his ledger than in his library. Besides, if he can do this, why stop there? Why should he not abolish the bookseller and sell his own books? Why not plant a clerk or a cashier in a rented shop in fifty country towns? They could doubtless make shift to sell a thousand copies each, and you would then add the bookseller's profits, such as they are, on the whole fifty thousand, to your own.'

In spite of the vigour with which Johnson pressed home these arguments, the author still held his ground sturdily. 'Publishers,' he complained, 'have been threatening in a high and mighty fashion to send us back to Grub Street, but we will show them that in

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

these days the dwellers in Grub Street have learned the lesson of revolt. They had no such temptation in your time, Dr. Johnson ; for bookselling was in a thriving state in those days, and authors were not so often starved out of existence.' JOHNSON (agitated) : ' Hold, sir. You are now talking of matters you know nothing of. In all ages there have been writers who lacked bread, and there are some such, I doubt not, in your own times. But if you think you would have bettered yourselves by going back to the days of Richard Savage, or if anyone has led you to suppose that there were fewer pens scribbling in vain to feed an empty belly in my time than in yours, why then, sir, your credulity has been much abused. We do not forget what we suffered in Grub Street, though there is neither sense nor pleasure in recalling it.'

I have not often seen this firm-minded and almost stoick philosopher so deeply moved at anything, and by way of turning his thoughts in the more pleasant direction of his own poetical treatment of this sad subject, I softly whispered the well-known couplet from the *Vanity of Human Wishes*:

' There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.'

' At least,' I added, ' you have got rid of patrons.' THE AUTHOR : ' There is but little gain in that. The

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

publisher is but the patron in another form. And *you* know what the publisher is, Dr. Johnson; you who once knocked down a bookseller with a fo—’ JOHNSON (hastily): ‘Sir, it was not so. The story is a ridiculous fable. The fellow was impertinent to me, and I beat him; but it was not with a folio. I had too much respect for books.’ THE AUTHOR: ‘But you have spoken against booksellers.’ JOHNSON: ‘Why, yes, sir; and so may you have spoken against those you have a value for. But I have said much more for them than I have ever said against them. Mr. Boswell’s book, if indeed it is still to be procured, will tell you that I spoke of them as “generous, liberal-minded men.” I acknowledged myself to have been handsomely treated by Mr. Millar for my Dictionary, though the sum I received for it will seem small indeed to you, sir—a poor fifteen hundred and seventy-five pounds—but little more than a third of the profits which have come to you from your love-tale.’ THE AUTHOR: ‘Posterity, Dr. Johnson, has admired your own magnanimity more than the liberality of the booksellers.’ JOHNSON: ‘Sir, I am much beholden to posterity; but, what is your own complaint of the booksellers? You do not seem to have fared so ill at their hands. Their faults, whatever they are, have not prevented you from obtaining a princely sum for your last work. This seems no sufficient cause for a grudge against

them.' THE AUTHOR: 'Pardon me, Dr. Johnson, but you mistake my motives. I have no grudge against the publisher. I am merely anxious to protect the country bookseller.' JOHNSON: 'Oh, if that is all you are concerned about, I think you may very well let it alone. I had supposed that you wished to increase your profits. You said, did you not, that by dealing directly with the last handler of your book before it goes to the reader you would put more into your own pocket as well as into his?' THE AUTHOR: 'True, I did say so; and so it would be; but that is a consideration which does not weigh with me. My object is to save the country bookseller from extinction.' JOHNSON: 'Sir, the country bookseller would have reason to be grateful to you, but you would hardly earn the applause of the virtuous by so invidious a benevolence. Nor will you increase the sum of human happiness if you merely save one trade from extinction by extinguishing another.'

The author was about to answer, but Johnson, who I perceived was becoming impatient of his tenacity, anticipated his reply with a 'Nay, sir, I beg you will use no further argument on a question that, in truth, admits of none. Had you pleaded your own interest you had silenced me; for that must be left to every man to decide for himself.' BOSWELL: 'Yes, sir, every man is the best judge of

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

that.' JOHNSON : 'Why, no, sir, a man is not necessarily the best judge of it. But he is the only judge with an authoritative commission to act, or with any power to execute his decrees. And so, sir, had you told me that you were consulting your own advantage in this, I had said nothing. But when you inform me that you are for setting the world to rights in this matter, I shall hardly be thought intrusive in attempting to dissuade you from such an adventure. It is not for fallible mortals to determine what lawful trades shall continue to exist for the good of Society, or to essay the part of an earthly Providence by attempting to cocker one trade and to crush out another. No, sir, if you will be guided by me, you will write another love-story, since such tales seem most to take the present taste of the town, and see if you cannot sell a hundred thousand copies of it at the same, or, if you can obtain it, at a higher percentage, leaving the booksellers, in town and country, to settle their own bargains with each other by the higgling of the market.'

It being now cock-crow we took our leave, and on our way back I ventured to rally Dr. Johnson on his zeal in the cause of the booksellers. 'After all, sir,' I said, 'is it any concern of the world how the author and the bookseller divide their spoils? And would it not be more decent of them to keep their disputes to themselves?' JOHNSON : 'Why, yes, sir, that may

be; but we are not to allow ourselves to be put off with false morality and bad reasoning in a public controversy because the disputants ought to have quarrelled in private. If a man and his wife fall to fisticuffs in Drury Lane instead of within doors, we may have an opinion on the battle and express it.' BOSWELL: 'That is true, sir; but we do not care a fig which wins; and why, then, should it matter to you whether Mr. —— could extinguish publishers or not?' JOHNSON: 'Sir, it does matter. It matters to every man, woman, and child in the kingdom. Suppose it were possible for him to do without the publisher in his own case, and, by that means, to drive an even better trade in his own works than he seems to have driven hitherto. Nay, suppose all other writers of the same kind could do the same thing. What would that prove as to the publishers' utility or inutility to the world? The gentleman talks as if all literature were contained within the covers of six-shilling romances that run through fifty editions in a year. But unless all literature be, in fact, contained therein, how will it fare with the remainder of it? Could the publisher be dispensed with for that? Can the poet, the historian, the moralist, open shop for themselves and send their own works by "a clerk or a cashier" direct from the binder to the country bookseller, to be by him disposed of to an eager crowd of buyers at the rate of a thousand copies a

THE REVOLUTION IN GRUB STREET

week? No, sir, we all well know that they cannot; and that, since they cannot, they will always need the services of some trader—call him publisher, bookseller, or what you will—with capital enough to undertake the venture, and to lie out of his money till its slow returns come back to him.'

Though I was only half convinced, I did not well see what to reply to this argument; which, Johnson noticing, he observed in a playful way

(Here, unfortunately, the fragment ends.)

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

THE royal roads to excellence in literary style are so numerous, that one cannot but wonder at the small number of those writers who complete the journey. And this wonder is increased when we remember by whom it is that the plan of the country has been drawn and the roads set down ; when we reflect that this has been the work not of the mere theoretical topographer tracing in his study the hypothetical windings of *à priori* paths, but of the successful travellers in person. It is the men who have made the journey themselves, that have supplied the materials for the itineraries in chief repute ; and a most perplexing *embarras de choix* do they present. One great writer has been reared on the Greek and Latin classics ; another has perfected himself by the assiduous study of the masterpieces, in every order of writing, of his own tongue ; a third has given his nights and days to the English Bible alone ; a fourth attributes his success to his habit of translating from

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

his own into other languages ; a fifth to his habit of translating from other languages into his own ; until at last the bewildered student is driven, according to the measure of his own success, to one of the two alternative conclusions, that all roads lead to Rome, or none ; that some men may acquire excellence of style in any way, and that others can do so in no way —that some are born to move freely and gracefully in composition, while others are destined to limp awkwardly on paper all their days. The only truth which would seem to be beyond question in the whole subject is the negative one that, be the capacity itself innate or acquired, it is by practice only that it can pass from the potential to the actual ; just as, though it may be idle to discuss whether a consummate swordsman is born or made, it is equally idle to deny that no man can become a swordsman at all without the laborious training of the fencing-school. Yet even this modest proposition seems to be shaken to its very foundation by such a case as that of Pascal, and such a feat of consummate literary sword-play as the *Provincial Letters*. Where, must many an astonished Jesuit have asked, did this novice learn his carte and tierce ? What is the use of long practice, what avails it to have studied every thrust—foul as well as fair—that your *maître d'armes* can teach you, if an invalid mathematician, who has never taken a polemical rapier in his hand before, is

to beat down your guard with disdainful ease at the first assault, and only not run you through the body because he can show his mastery and his contempt more effectively by prolonging the bout? And the same question must suggest itself, with no diminution of its interest, to all who turn from such records as we possess of Pascal's life to that monument of his many-sided genius which he has left behind him in the *Provincial Letters*.

There is probably no case in which the intellectual personality and intellectual history of an author are less likely to be correctly deduced from a mere examination of his works than the case of Blaise Pascal. His hereditary bent and his early studies, from at least the age of twelve, were exclusively mathematical. Even if, with Professor de Morgan, we reject as mythical the story of Pascal's having at twelve years of age worked out the first thirty-two propositions of Euclid's first book, from independent reasoning on the properties of geometrical figures, and without his having opened an Euclid in his life, we may safely assume that the myth had some foundation in fact. It is natural, at any rate, to assume that nothing but some remarkable evidence of the boy's precocious talent for mathematics would have induced the elder Pascal to withdraw his former inhibition of his son from entering upon this line of study. Certain it is that from Pascal's twelfth

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

year (1635) upwards, he had full liberty to indulge his genius for mathematical pursuits, and that he availed himself of the permission with the greatest ardour and success. From this date until the year of his final retirement from the world, Pascal's recorded life is one continuous history of mathematical and physical studies, interrupted occasionally by the wretched health to which he was a victim from his eighteenth year, but never, so far as is known, diverted systematically to any other form of intellectual, and certainly not to any other form of literary, occupation.

In 1639, at the age of sixteen, he wrote that treatise on Conic Sections which excited the astonished admiration of Descartes; at nineteen he contrived his remarkable 'arithmetical machine'; some years later he began that memorable series of experimental inquiries into the ponderability of air, which will always preserve an honourable place for his name in the history of physical science. Before the close of his twenty-sixth year these experiments were concluded, and, impelled probably by his fast declining health (he had had a stroke of paralysis two years before), he virtually abandoned secular studies altogether. In 1654, shortly after the accident which nearly cost him his life, and which left a permanent effect upon his mind, he finally retired from the world, and joined that band of *illustres et dangereux solitaires*, at Port Royal, who had just commenced

their struggle with the Papacy, destined to be waged, with one brief interval of armistice, for upwards of sixty years. Of his life in the monastery we know little, save that it was a life of the severest self-mortification, which could have left him little time or inclination for other than spiritual matters,—none assuredly for the cultivation, either by study or practice, of that consummate controversial style of which he was within two years to appear as a master. His life was probably that of a thoughtful ascetic, divided between religious exercises and theological reflection; as for secular reading, he was, as he himself tells us, *homo unius libri*, the essays of Montaigne.

And it was from this retirement, from this inaction, we may say, that Pascal emerged, in 1656, the most brilliant and deadly controversialist that ever wielded a pen, and one of the greatest masters of literary style—a writer who, by the confession of an unsympathetic, and in some respects an unfair critic, rivalled Bossuet in eloquence and Molière in wit, and to whose work, on the testimony of the same witness, Voltaire, *il faut rapporter l'époque de la fixation du language*.

One must admit, I think, that the engraftment of a *dérot* on a mathematician is a process from which we should hardly have expected such splendid results; but it is not so much their mere intellectual splendour as their artistic perfection—not their genius, great as it is, so much as their craftsmanship, which surprises.

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

Were it otherwise, were the *Provincial Letters* merely a collection of eloquent, powerfully-reasoned, subtle, thoughtful, witty 'things,' instead of forming as they do one 'thing' very different from and much rarer than these or any collection of these, one might get much nearer to explaining them from a consideration of the occasion and the man. Intense moral earnestness has a distinct intellectual reaction, and *indignatio* of the nobler order makes eloquence and force, and wit too, as well as verse. No doubt Pascal's deep religious feeling, his sympathy with the oppressed Jansenists, his zeal for a pure morality, and his scorn and detestation of those whose doctrines were adulterating it, all conspired to give not only warmth but brilliancy to his writings. The lambent flash of his wit leaped up, no doubt, even as the steady flame of his denunciation glowed forth, from the inner fires of an intense spiritual conviction. But all this leaves the real difficulty untouched, which is that Pascal's peculiar power—the power and enduring vitality of his great work as a whole—is derived from that most complex, and, in some sense, artificial of all creations—style. Intense earnestness, acting on adequate intellectual gifts, will do much. It will enkindle, or rather, when raised to a certain power, it will of itself become eloquence; it will quicken the play of the reasoning faculty; it will stimulate that fine sense of latent analogy which begets wit, and that fine sense of

latent incongruity which begets humour ; but it cannot create the power of co-ordinating all these results so as to give them their maximum effect in combination. This is, and remains, the alchemic secret of 'style.'

The magnitude of Pascal's obligations to his style may, I think, be insisted on without any danger of incurring that charge of dogmatism which justly lies against so many of the attempts to assign to form and matter their respective shares in the production of a writer's total literary effect. Of course the operation cannot in any case, least of all in the case of a foreign writer, be performed with more than approximate accuracy ; but in the instance of Pascal there are at least two grounds on which we are justified in assigning an unusually large share of his total literary effect to sheer excellence of form. The most salient characteristics of the *Provincial Letters* are the perfect finish of their wit, and the masterly ease with which, especially in the earlier Letters, an abstruse argument is conducted in the colloquial and narrative styles, and without any recourse to that logical, or rather mathematical, form of arrangement which wearies the reader at least, if it assists the writer. Both of these characteristics bear a specially intimate relation to the form of expression. The value of 'form' in wit belongs theoretically to one of the most obscure parts of an obscure subject ;

but in practice it ranks almost as a commonplace of observation. It is proved experimentally nearly every day in the magical effect produced by the slightest change in the phrasing of a *mot*. In no other case are words of so high an intrinsic value, and yet so worthless ‘in exchange.’ To ascribe great finish of wit to any work is almost *ex vi terminorum* to attribute to it great excellence of pure form ; and the wit of Pascal is of a perfection of finish rarely met with even in a language renowned for its capacities in this kind of perfection. It is distinguished by that masterly restraint and repression which gives to the wit of two or three, and only two or three, of the most brilliant of Frenchmen, a subtle power which the less habile genius of our language denies to English wit. We may say, I think, ‘of our language,’ and not of our intellectual habit, for the ‘heaviness of hand’ of which English wit is sometimes accused seems more often—if at least we confine ourselves to the best specimens—a defect in the instrument rather than in the hands that wield it. It is not, as is sometimes said, especially by Frenchmen, that we English do not value innuendo, but that our language does not lend itself to innuendo : it is not that we do not feel the artistic force of *saying less* than is meant, but that in English it is so much more difficult than in French to *convey more* than one says. To attempt to rival in our language the finesse of the

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

best French wit is to run the risk of either missing the desired effect altogether, through obscurity, or of marring it by paraphrases at once too elaborate and too obviously premeditated. It is like attempting to draw a very fine line with a very blunt pencil, by studied lightness of touch. A thick line *must* be drawn, or the paper will remain blank. But the French language has a point like a 'crowquill,' and in fingers which can ply it deftly it produces effects which we English can admire but cannot copy. Seldom has the instrument been plied by a lighter hand than Pascal's; indeed, when one has named Voltaire, one can think of no other writer whose touch is to be matched against that of the author of the *Provincial Letters*—of none certainly whom this form of excellence has ever stood in better polemical stead. For the impression of calculated restraint which this lightness of touch conveys is to Pascal, as again and again to Voltaire, a distinct point of controversial power, in virtue of the air of careless superiority which it gives to his attack, as well as of the immense reserve of intellectual strength which it seems to hint at. To recur to the metaphor from the fencing-school, it is as though the skilful swordsman, having easily put aside his adversary's guard, should forego the death lunge which would end the duel at once, and content himself with inflicting a disdainful scratch. Even in the mere personalities of controversy, this

effect may be produced. We have all the feeling of the spectators of some such unequal struggle when Voltaire, ridiculing Warburton's denial of the vindictiveness of the Jewish character, exclaims, '*Est-il possible qu'un cœur tel que le tien se trompe si grossièrement sur la haine? C'est un usurier qui ne sait pas compter.*' A less contemptuously confident swordsman would hardly have contented himself with this lightning-like pass and recovery, but would have transfixed his adversary again and again. A minor master of sarcasm who had lighted on this venomous gibe would have diluted its vitriol over half a page.

Pascal, though his sarcasm is free from the personality, and has assuredly none of the somewhat diabolic flavour of the above sally, uses often the same contemptuous brevity and compression. Nor is it only in single thrusts at his adversaries that he shows this power. Throughout the whole *Story of Jean d'Alba*, and Pascal's application of it to the Jesuit morality, what an appearance of power is produced by the humiliating leniency with which he treats his casuist interlocutor, by the studied moderation and dryness of the irony with which he points out the weak spot in the secular relations of the Jesuit system! Jean d'Alba, servant at a Jesuit college, has robbed his masters, and has pleaded the casuisms of Father Bauny before the criminal court, with no better result than that of being sen-

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

tenced to a flogging, and of seeing the works of his dangerous preceptor handed over to the torch of the public executioner by the indignant judge. But on Pascal's relating this story to his Jesuit friend, the latter, not quick at passing from books to facts, finds it strangely irrelevant. Pascal, he complains, is interrupting their interesting talk on the subject of casuistic ethics by *des histoires hors de propos*.

“ ‘I did but make a passing reference to the anecdote,’ I replied, ‘just to call your attention to an important point which I find you have overlooked in establishing your ‘doctrine of probability.’ ‘Eh! what is that?’ said the father; ‘what flaw can there be in the doctrine after so many acute persons have examined it?’ ‘This,’ I replied. ‘You have amply secured, so far as God and their own consciences are concerned, the position of those who follow your ‘probable opinions;’ for according to your doctrine, one may make oneself quite easy on those heads by following the opinion of a doctor of weight. Further, you have secured your disciples’ position on the side of the confessors; for you compel your confessors, under pain of mortal sin, to grant absolution for any act committed in reliance on a ‘probable opinion.’ But on the side of the judges, you have omitted to secure the position of your disciples so that they find themselves in danger of the scourge or the gibbet in following your ‘probabilities.’ It is a capital omission, that.’ ‘You are right,’ replied the father, ‘and I am much obliged to you; but the reason is that we have not the same authority over magistrates that we have over confessors, who are obliged to refer to us on all cases of conscience; for on those matters we are the supreme judges.’ ‘I see,’ replied I. ‘Still, if on the one hand you are the judges of the confessors, are you not, on the other hand, the confessors of the judges? Your power is very extensive; why not compel the judges, under pain of excommunication, to acquit these criminals who have a probable opinion on their side, so as

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

to prevent its happening to the great contempt and scandal of the probability doctrine, that those whom you pronounce innocent in theory be flogged or hanged in practice. Otherwise how will you obtain disciples?" "I must think this over," replied he, "it is not a matter to be neglected. I will refer it to our Provincial."

Nor is the power of pure style less manifest in the unsought lucidity of Pascal's exposition, the orderly though unordered procession of his argument. There is no parade of arrangement, no employment of the favourite mechanical artifices for keeping the reader's—and as often as not the writer's—head clear; but yet the thread of the argument need never be missed by a commonly attentive student. This mastery of what may be called (in the best sense) popular dialectic, this gift of managing an intricate reasoning process in entire independence of scholastic method, is very rare; it is perhaps rarest of all in those who have trained themselves on the mathematics for the work of controversy. A purely mathematical culture is perhaps the worst preparation for the acquirement of that popular dialectic in which Pascal so excelled. To those who have undergone such a training, and have become thoroughly imbued with its method, the digressions, the inversions, the transposition of parts which are of the essence of popular dialectic, are repugnant, if not impossible. The steps of their argument must follow one another in regular series, or not at all. They themselves are men of 'sections,'

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

‘sub-sections,’ ‘sub-sub-sections,’ and the rest of it ; and they exhaust the accepted symbols of para-graphic sub-division in their efforts after a precise and logical arrangement of their matter. Their argument moves forward like an army in battle array, with a Roman numeral commanding each division, italic numerals heading the brigades, the regiments under command of the letters of the English alphabet, and (a), (β), (γ), &c., each leading his allotted company. ‘*C'est la guerre, mais ce n'est pas magnifique*,’ except perhaps to the professional student of the art of controversial war.

Nothing but Pascal's complete emancipation from this repulsive method could have won him readers for the earlier *Letters* ; since they, it must be remembered, have none of the claims to interest which were possessed by the later. As soon as ‘*M. de Montalte*’ began to carry the war into the enemy's country, as soon as it became known that the policy and morality of the Jesuits were being exposed and dissected by a master-hand, it is no wonder that readers should have multiplied. But Pascal did not begin this retaliatory warfare ; probably the thought of it did not occur to him until the great success of his first letters had assured him of a large and sympathetic audience. And it is the success of these, the popularity, that is to say, of three disquisitions upon the *pouvoir prochain*, the *grace suffisante*, and the *grace actuelle*, which consti-

tutes the real triumph of his expository style. No doubt the Port Royalists and their learned and pious leader enjoyed a fair share of popular admiration and sympathy at the outset; but it was one thing to sympathise generally with Arnauld, and quite another to devour with delight the history of a theological intrigue which even Pascal's wonderful art cannot always make it easy to follow. This could not have been popularised but by means of the dramatic interest, the unflagging life and movement with which Pascal contrives to inform his narrative. The power which it shows in this respect is of a very high kind. M. Villemain's declaration indeed—‘that he should have admired Pascal less if he had lived after Molière instead of before him’—is, so far as it institutes a comparison between the dramatic achievements of the two writers, surely a freak of eulogy, which is alone sufficient to show that the ‘literary influence of academies’ does not always ‘make for’ sanity of criticism; but without indulging in extravagances of this sort one may give full recognition to Pascal's dramatic gift. And in doing this one should protest as much against the litotes of M. Villemain's comparison of Pascal with Plato, as against the hyperbole of his comparison of Pascal with Molière. Of the four elements of dramatic excellence, Plato has at most but the mastery of two—character and dialogue; while Pascal, besides being a far greater

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

master of both these, adds to them a command of plot and situation. Witness the remarkable skill with which the Jesuit intrigue for the censure of Arnauld by the Sorbonne is gradually unfolded in the first letter, and the genuine high comedy of the *dénouement*, in which the Dominican who has agreed to a hollow verbal truce with the Jesuit is nearly ruining all by being betrayed into an explanation of his meaning. It was not only easier but safer to rely on 'monks than reasons' for the condemnation of the Port Royalist leader.

With the third letter, however, the interest of plot, so to call it, is at an end, and in the exposure of the Jesuit policy and morality, the interest of character and of exquisite ironic dialogue takes undisputed place. Here there is more room for the comparison between Pascal and Plato, but it cannot be said that the resemblance after all is very close or very suggestive. Plato's Sophist and Pascal's Casuist are very different figures, and assume widely different attitudes. The adulterator of philosophy is, it must be confessed, 'something of a shadowy being,' like the ghost described by Dr. Johnson—at any rate, he has little vitality, and is at best a mere lay figure to hang fallacies on; the adulterator of morals in the pages of Pascal is a creation of unmistakable flesh and blood, and a highly finished one to boot. The skill with which the Jesuit casuist is

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

drawn, and especially with which the *naïveté* and simplicity of the character (so amusingly illustrated in the extract above quoted) are brought out, serves of course a dialectical end; but not, one feels, a dialectical end alone. It has a deeper purpose than this. For the intention and the effect of the portrait is to render casuistry credible as a profession; to show how, given the requisite combination of pedantry and *esprit de corps*, it could be adopted as a profession by a body of men not universally, or even perhaps generally, less scrupulous than their neighbours. Pascal's Jesuit interlocutor is, one easily sees, far better than his principles, which indeed are sometimes plainly at variance with his healthier instincts. '*Ce n'est pas de moi-même*,' he protests on one occasion, when Pascal exclaims against the enormity of a certain doctrine. But, good man, he is a little blunt of perception, and he has turned the edge of his faculties still further by exclusive devotion to the text-books of casuistry. He has, in short, paid the penalty which is inseparably attached to excess of unintelligent study—to reading uninformed by reflection—which means the cultivation of the receptive faculty at the expense of the judgment. He has arrived at that stage in which the learning of books bulks larger than the realities of things, in which 'what has been written' so fills the mind that it cares not to, and even cannot, inquire, 'What *is*.'

Pedantry and the exaggerated faith of the pedant in the utility of his laboriously acquired knowledge, these and *esprit de corps*, the be-all and end-all of Jesuit training, combine to effect the astounding result. Pascal's Jesuit is conscious that he is learned, that the doctors he has studied are subtle and of blameless lives, that the great Society of Jesus is an organization of all-embracing power and activity, and so, on the whole, he will bring himself to teach and defend the most marvellous perversions of morality, and even exclaim at last in genuine surprise, '*Doutez-vous d'une chose que nos auteurs enseignent?*'

It is by means of this so real and vivid portrait that Pascal contrives to give practical interest, and, as it were, 'urgency' to the attack on Jesuitism. We feel that it is no question of demolishing a speculative error, but of combating a practical and instant danger to the human commonwealth. We feel that Pascal is at war not with a theory, but with an organization; and we only begin to appreciate the insidious and far-reaching power of that organization when we see in the person of Pascal's interlocutor what respectable weapons it is able to employ, what well-meaning blunt-wits it can enlist in its evil service.

Pascal's own view of the spirit and methods of the great Society is of course sternly hostile, but it is

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

distorted by none of that blind hatred which makes so much of our ultra-Protestant invective against Jesuitism fly wide of the mark. Few more astonishing errors have been made by one great writer about another than the blunder of which Voltaire has been guilty in his criticism of Pascal. The attempt of the *Provincial Letters*, says the author of the *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, is to prove that they (the Jesuits) had conceived 'the deliberate design of corrupting the morals of mankind, a design which no sect or society ever had or ever could have.' Voltaire's last quoted reflection is so obviously just that one can only wonder at his imputing to Pascal the error which it condemns. As a matter of fact, Pascal repudiates it in express terms, and in a sentence which is acquitted of any suspicion of irony, by the sarcastic remark which follows it. It is less surprising, however, that Voltaire, and after him M. Villemain, should have overlooked this passage than that, even having overlooked it, they should not have hesitated on mere *à priori* grounds to attribute to Pascal so vulgar and unintelligent a theory of Jesuit policy. Pascal, we might have been sure, even without his word for it, better understood the genesis and purpose of those perversions of morality which he was about so ruthlessly to expose. But his own language on the point is clear:—'Sachez donc que leur objet n'est pas de corrompre les mœurs: ce n'est pas leur

dessein. Mais ils n'ont pas aussi pour unique but celui de les reformer: ce serait une mauvaise politique. Voici quelle est leur pensée. Ils ont assez bonne opinion d'eux-mêmes pour croire qu'il est utile et comme nécessaire au bien de la religion que leur crédit s'étende partout et qu'ils gouvernent toutes les consciences.' (Lett. V.)

This is certainly a more intelligent theory of Jesuitism than that denounced by Voltaire, though we must admit, I think, that even this analysis is not quite adequate. A religious organization aiming at secular ascendancy, and prepared to sacrifice rigour of morals in their efforts after their object, is undoubtedly a more credible conception than that of a society aiming at the 'corruption of morals' for its own sake: but though it is a sufficient account of 'organic Jesuitism,' so to say, it fails, I think, to distinguish an important element in the formation of the individual Jesuit. There was and is something more than mere worldly ambition and *esprit de corps* amongst the rank and file of the Order. The truth, though it may seem to resemble a paradox, is, I think, that there was a moral element in the Jesuit system which, and which alone, has enabled it to enlist the services of conscientious men; and made it possible for them to read the motto of the Society,—*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*—without that strong temptation to augurial smiling which plain men in all times have found it so

difficult to prevent crediting them with. The moral element, such as it is, is one with which Pascal's stern and semi-Calvinistic theology, as well as his austere morality, rendered him incapable of sympathizing; but which, nevertheless, appeals to one of the deepest instincts of a certain order of mind. The Jesuit casuistry was, in part at least, the expression of a feeling—profoundly unscriptural, no doubt, but still profoundly human—that the way of salvation must not be made too hard for men; that quantity as well as quality in the matter of converts deserves to be considered; and that as it is given to few to attain complete virtue, God may be well served by leading man a little distance at least upon the road. Dangerous as this principle is, and monstrous as we see its results to have been in practice, there is nothing absolutely astonishing in the fact that conscientious men found it possible to accept the principle and shut their eyes to the results. The resources of human self-deception are practically boundless, as we may see illustrated in our own day. After all, the attitude of the Jesuits towards morals was not widely different from the attitude of a modern school of theology towards faith. The Jesuits were in fact the 'Broad Churchmen' of morality, and hardly performed more astounding feats of legerdemain with their consciences than we see certain divines among us performing every day with their intellects.

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

With this aspect of the Jesuit system, however, it was not, as has been said, in Pascal's loftily ascetic nature to sympathize. When he had admitted that the Jesuits made terms with the flesh as followers of the world merely, and not as agents of the devil; that they sophisticated virtue not from mere delight in vice, but to gain certain temporal ends of their own, he had gone to the utmost limit of his concessions. As men of the world masquerading in the character of men of the other world, they deserved, he thought, no quarter at his hands; while as the ubiquitous and all-powerful Society, the very spiders of political intrigue, the ever-busy band of schemers with a foot in every powerful house, and a whisperer at the ear of every prince, supreme at Versailles, and never long in abeyance at the Vatican, leniency towards them would, he felt, be as dangerous as undeserved. Odious, as the defilers of morality and the contaminators of the sincere milk of Augustinian doctrines, they were formidable as unscrupulous political adversaries; and the instinct of self-preservation conspired with zeal for the truth to urge that the attack upon them should be as resolute and as deadly as it could be made.

How Pascal did the work which he thus set himself remains on record for all time. He did it in such a way that since his day it has needed no second doing. The Jesuits, in giving to the *Provincial*

Letters the nickname of the ‘immortal liars,’ have at least hit the mark in their adjective; whether the letters tell the truth or not, anyone who doubts can ascertain for himself, for Pascal’s charges are preferred with all the precision of an indictment, and chapter and verse are given for every one of those lax dicta of the Jesuit doctors over which the thunder of his denunciation and the lightning of his ridicule have rolled and flashed. But while he thus traces home every vicious sophism to its individual author, he never loses sight for a moment of the many-visaged presence of his real enemy, the Society itself: It is a striking illustration of the forensic thoroughness of Pascal’s work, that he should have so decisively anticipated the only plea by which an unwonted apologist of the Jesuits attempted a century later to save the collective credit of the Order at the expense of certain individual members. When Voltaire complains of Pascal’s having unfairly attributed to the whole Society the extravagant opinions of a few Spanish and Flemish doctors, he overlooks two points which Pascal is at special pains to impress upon his readers—first, that the *permissus superiorum*, without which no Jesuit work can be published, fixes the Order as a whole with responsibility for all the doctrines which any such work may contain; and secondly, that the existence of a rigid, as well as a lax school of Jesuit casuistry, is in no respect sur-

prising, but on the contrary a result naturally to be expected from the adroit policy of the Order. God and Mammon, in fact, could scarce have been jointly served with success on any other terms. It would have been a waste of power for the Society to have encouraged the existence of any large number of lax casuists. Thanks to the invaluable Jesuit doctrine of Probability, the sanction of even a single 'doctor of weight' was sufficient to justify the vicious in indulging their favourite vices; while, on the other hand, it was, as Pascal points out, a most convenient thing to be able to quiet the scruples of alarmed virtue by appealing, when occasion arose, to the severer maxims of other Jesuit doctors of equal learning and repute.

But, however strongly our moral sympathies may be enlisted on the side of Pascal, it is scarcely possible on the whole case to refrain from commiserating the Jesuits. Their ill-luck in the matter was as monstrous as would be that of a man who should be called out and shot in a duel by an adversary challenging him under a complete misconception of facts. For the deadly disputant against whom they found themselves pitted had, after all, taken the field under a mistake. It was Pascal's sympathy for Arnauld and his zeal for the true faith, which he believed the Port Royalist doctor to be supporting—these motives, and not, at least originally, any desire to expose the

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

Jesuit teaching—that first brought him into the fray. And as he entered, so he quitted it. His first letter is on the *pouvoir prochain*, and his last on the question of the Papal fallibility, *sur le fait*—the *fait* of course being whether the five condemned propositions were or were not in the *Augustinus*. He began and ended as a theologian, and as a theologian he was in error throughout on the practical question at issue between the Jansenists and Jesuits. It must, then, have been deeply mortifying to these latter, or to their successors of a somewhat later date, to learn that Pascal himself afterwards recognized his error, and that he had, on more mature consideration, to abandon altogether the position which he assumed on the Jansenist controversy throughout the *Provincial Letters*. His convictions reached maturity sadly too late for the interests of the Jesuit doctors; for in the meantime, and by way of effecting a mere diversion, he had utterly annihilated the elaborate structure of the Jesuit casuistry.

That the position which Pascal took up in the Jansenist dispute was untenable—if we must again fill our bellies with the east wind of this arid controversy—it will not be difficult to show. Only as regards the second of the five condemned propositions can he be pronounced to have made out even an appearance of a case; on the others, and on the question of fact connected with them, he manifestly

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

fails. He was able to show with some plausibility that Jansenius had not taught downright Calvinism regarding the operation of predestination to life, but he failed to distinguish either Jansenius's doctrine or his own, or for that matter that of the Church, on the subject of reprobation, from the doctrine of Calvin upon the same point. First, as to the former question. Pascal points out, with his usual felicitous perspicuity of style, that Jansenius had not committed himself to the Calvinist necessarian theory that man cannot resist grace, and the line of argument which he adopts exposes clearly the origin of what he conceives to be the misconception of those who condemned Jansenius on this point.

Jansenius, according to him, had not taught pure necessarianism in teaching that man could not resist Divine grace. Man in Jansenius's system, as explained by Pascal, still retained his free-will, and might use it in endeavouring to resist Divine grace: only the endeavour would be of necessity unsuccessful. Grace must and would produce its effect in time; but it would do so not by overruling, but by enlisting his will in God's service—by sanctifying it so that it was infallibly led to God, *par un mouvement toute libre, tout volontaire, tout amoureux*.

We are of course far from saying that the distinction here sought to be drawn between what are only two modes of equal necessity has any real existence.

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

It has not; but it may have a theological existence, theological distinctions having in all ages been nobly independent of any objective foundation; and Pascal doubtless thought that it was not incumbent upon him to show that Jansenius held a doctrine of genuine free-will, but that it was sufficient for him to prove that he did not hold a doctrine identical in terms with that of Calvinistic necessity. But, though he may have gained a technical triumph on this second proposition, not even on this did he gain a substantial victory. It was merely the form in which the condemnation of Jansenius on this point had happened to be couched which enabled Pascal to achieve a semblance of success. For the doctrine intended to be condemned in the second proposition was the doctrine that 'Divine grace never fails of its effect.'¹ This was the heresy of Jansenius, and this heresy remains after Pascal's vindication, since he also held, as we have seen, that Divine grace was invariably efficacious, and it was immaterial, therefore, whether this invariable efficacy was the result

¹ The second of the condemned propositions does not occur textually in the *Augustinus*, but is matter of inference from a passage in the second book. 'Haec est vera ratio cur nulla omnino medicinalis gratia Christi effectu suo careat,' &c., Book ii. c. 55. On which comments a latter Catholic theologian, 'Si autem nulla gratia effectu suo careat igitur interiori gratia nunquam resistitur cum gratiae interiori resistere idem sit ac eam effectu suo defraudare,' the Catholic doctrine being, he adds, that grace 'non semper eum obtinet effectum ad quem a Deo datur.'

of pure necessity, or of a human will being invariably directed to God *par un mouvement tout libre, tout volontaire, tout amoureux.*

On all the other propositions Pascal's failure to make out his case is still more conspicuous. To take first the question of the *fait*, the question, that is, of the authorship of the condemned propositions as distinguished from the question of their heterodoxy. His well-known argument was that Papal infallibility was confined to the *droit*, and did not extend to the *fait*, and that while the Jansenists could be called on to repudiate the five condemned propositions (which, added Pascal, they did *ex animo*), they could not be justly required to believe and confess that Jansenius had affirmed these propositions, at least in the sense in which the Holy See had condemned them. And all this argument is conducted in Pascal's best manner. But it is a line of argument suited only to a controversy which had itself been conducted from beginning to end in total defiance of that method so caustically recommended by Voltaire—‘Il eut mieux valu peut-être la peine de citer les passages du livre : c'est ce qu'on ne fit jamais.’ Had the passages from Jansenius been openly cited by the Jesuits, which—from fear of falling foul of Augustin, under whose sanction they had been put forward—none dared to do, they would have thoroughly refuted Pascal. The fact is that all these four propositions are to be found

verbatim, or nearly so, in Jansenius's book. The first proposition, condemned by Innocent X. as 'temerariam impiam, blasphemam, anathemate damnatam, et hæreticam,' was the proposition that 'there are some commands of God which righteous and good men are absolutely unable to obey, though disposed to do so, and that God does not give them so much grace that they are able to observe them.' And in *Augustinus* (Book iii. c. 13), we find, 'Hæc igitur plenissime planissimeque demonstrat nihi esse in S. Augustini doctrinâ certius ac fundatius quam esse præcepta quædam quæ hominibus non tantum infidelibus, excæcatis, obduratis, sed fidelibus quoque et justis, volentibus, conantibus secundum præsentes quas habeant vires, sunt impossibilia: deesse quoque gratiam quâ fiant possibilia.' The second proposition we have already discussed. The third subject of the Papal anathema is the doctrine 'that in order to a man's being worthy of praise or blame before God, he need not be exempt from subjective necessity, but merely from objective coercion.' And Jansenius says (*Aug.*, B. vi. c. 24), 'Clarissimis verbis docuit S. Thomas arbitrium hominis dictum esse liberum quia non cogitur,' and 'opus esse laude vel vituperio dignum meritorum ex hoc quod est voluntarium, spontaneum, non coactum, *tametsi determinatum ad unum*.' The fourth condemned proposition was the doctrine that 'the semi-Pelagian error con-

sisted in believing that the human will had the power of either admitting or rejecting the operations of Divine grace.' The passage in the *Augustinus* (Book viii. c. 6) is, 'Hoc proprie semi-Pelagianorum error solus est quod aliquod primævæ libertatis reliquum putant . . . quod sicut Adam si voluisset poterat . . . ita lapsus homo saltem credere potest si vellet, neuter tamen absque interioris gratiâ adjutorio, cuius usus vel abusus esset in unius cujusque arbitrio et potestati.' Lastly, the Pope had condemned the proposition that it was a semi-Pelagian error to hold that 'Christ died for the sins of all mankind.' And Jansenius has plainly affirmed that doctrine to be false in the passage B. iii. c. 21: 'Quæ sane cum in Augustini doctrinâ perspicua certaque sint, nullo modo principiis ejus consentaneum est ut Christus Dominus vel pro infidelium in infidelitate morientium vel pro justorum non perseverantium æternâ salute mortuus esse, sanguinem fudisse, semet ipsum redemptorem dedisse, gratiam obsecrasse sentiatur. Scivit enim quo quisque jam ab æterno prædestinatus erat, scivit hoc decretum neque ullius pretii oblatione mutandum esse nec seipsum velle mutare, ex quo factum est ut juxta Sanctissimum Doctorem non magis Patrem pro æternâ liberatione ipsorum quam pro diabolorum deprecatus fuerit.' All these propositions, says Pascal, the Jansenists are bound to condemn and do condemn *ex animo*, but they are not

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

bound to believe that they are in the *Augustinus*, and, in fact, they and I deny that they are there. There, nevertheless, they are.

So much, then, for the question of the *fait*. It remains only to point out that Pascal and, so far as he represented them, the Jansenists were within the Papal condemnation of the first and most important proposition as regards the *droit* also. For he himself maintains the exact equivalent of the condemned doctrine on his own account, and asserts it to be, as probably enough it was, the orthodox teaching of the Church on the subject. He contends at the close of Letter I, in summing up the results of his exposure of the Jesuit machinations against Arnauld, that the following propositions have never been condemned either on one side or the other: '(1) that grace is not given to all men ; (2) that all the just have always the power to obey the commandments of God ; (3) that nevertheless, in order to perform them, and even to pray for grace to perform them, they have need of an efficient grace which invincibly determines their will ; (4) that that efficient grace is not always given to all the just, but depends on the pure mercy of God.' But surely (2), (3), and (4) if taken together establish a contradiction (for how can all just men possess a power which is itself conditional on a gift of grace not vouchsafed to all the just?) ; while it is evident that (3) and (4) taken together assert by implication the

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

first of the condemned propositions, for if the just cannot perform the divine commandments without a gift of grace, which some of them do not receive, to those not so favoured the said commandments are impossible.

It is of course equally true that the Jesuits who condemned Jansenius, themselves held nominally, or at any rate could not venture to deny openly, the condemned proposition. The only distinction which they could have set up between their own and the Jansenist doctrine (and this distinction had to be kept in the backgrouud in order to the sham alliance with the Dominicans to compass the censure of Arnauld in the Sorbonne) was this:—that whereas the Jansenists, their opponents, and the Dominicans, their sham allies, alike held that grace was necessary even to enable a man to pray for such grace as would enable him to do the will of God, they, the Jesuits, held that the just required no antecedent gift of grace to enable them to pray for grace. But even then, as the Jesuits dared not deny that grace was necessary as a means of obeying the commandments, and as they admitted that it was not freely given to all, and did not venture to affirm that it was even given to all who prayed for it, they had no right to condemn as a heresy the proposition that some of the divine commandments were to some of the just impossible.

The truth is, as must appear to all who have the

courage to wade through these barren polemics, that there are only two logical positions to be held on this question—the position of the Pelagian and that of the Calvinist—the position of those who believe that man can secure his salvation of his own free-will, and the position of those who hold that he is the abject slave of necessity, to be saved or damned solely according as a grace, which he is unable to secure or even solicit of his own free-will, is given to or withheld from him by an omnipotent being. Pascal really belonged to the latter of these schools and the Jesuits to the former; but, from widely differing motives, mental and moral, neither party could or did admit his true affinities. Pascal was an unconscious Calvinist, trying in vain to distinguish between his own creed and that which had been condemned by his Church, and doing so from an honest desire to submit himself to that Church. The Jesuits were conscious Pelagians, who skilfully concealed their heresy for fear of losing their influence. The practical result of this contest between candour and duplicity was such as might have been expected. Pascal in his efforts to escape the condemnation incurred by Calvin, and to avert it from the teacher whom he followed, contended with manifest ill success that his teacher never taught, and that he himself never held, the doctrine which had been condemned. The Jesuits, on the other hand, without committing themselves to an open denial of

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

Augustinian doctrine, succeeded in procuring its condemnation in the person of an alleged follower of Calvin. In the meantime, it is true, as Gibbon says, that the difference between Augustin whom the Church of Rome has canonized and Calvin whom she has reprobated is invisible.

Yet the Jesuits, with their usual art, contrived to conceal in a great measure their own embarrassment while consummating their adversaries' disgrace. The intellectual self-deception of Pascal is, however, more surprising than the moral dishonesty of the Jesuits, and the probability that this self-deception could not have permanently prevailed over so acute a mind, lends much credibility to the story cited by Bayle, from the *Histoire des Cinq Propositions*, to the effect that Pascal subsequently recognised the fact that it was the orthodox doctrine—the true faith as held and taught by Augustin, and as embraced, for all his alleged heresy, by Calvin, which had been anathematized by Innocent X. In other words, he came at last to see, what only theological controversy could have ever hidden from him, that his own theory of an impotent 'power' to obey the commandments was in truth no whit less absurd and self-contradictory than the inadequate 'sufficient grace' of the Molinists which he had transfixed with some of the happiest shafts of his ridicule.

But who now cares for this? Who now troubles

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

himself to inquire whether Pascal was victorious or vanquished on the theological issue? What now would be the whole weary literature of Jansenism to mankind but for this one work of matchless art and strength? A vast field of half-buried ruins, lost beneath the luxuriant overgrowth of modern interest and modern thought—a hidden world into which the curious antiquarian might find his account in burrowing, but which the traveller intent on worthier objects would pass by. As it is, however, there are few indeed who make the journey of self-culture without turning aside for a pilgrimage to these else unlovely ruins, for in their midst stands the great work of Pascal, erect, solitary, flawless; a single stately column visible from afar.

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

AMONG many signs of a growing recognition of human brotherhood not the least notable are the praiseworthy attempts of 'the peoples' to understand and, if possible, appreciate each other's recorded jokes. There is an element of the humorous in the very endeavour. It assumes, to begin with, that a joke, whether considered as a natural or, as is too often the case, a manufactured product, is necessarily a subject of international exchange. This is, from the economical point of view, a curious theory, which apparently implies that though all, or at any rate most, nations produce their own jokes some in greater, some in less quantity, but usually in an amount sufficient to supply the home market, and to render the native consumer independent of foreign supplies, it is, nevertheless, at his option to vary the quality of the consumable product to any extent by taking consignments of it from abroad. It is a mere question of the

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

cost and difficulty of transport, which latter word, it should be noted, is etymologically almost identical with the word 'translation.' These matters arranged, and the foreign joke delivered safely to the purchaser, he has nothing to do but to sit down to its enjoyment; and this with as absolute an assurance of relishing it, even though 'made in Germany,' as the *gourmet* feels in opening a jar of Russian caviare. If the taste disappoints him he attributes the defect to the fault of the intermediary, and reproaches the translator as a consignee of goods would reproach a slovenly packer through whose negligent performance of his duty they had 'gone bad' in transit. That the goods may be quite unsuited to his taste, or outside the range of his appreciation, never seems to occur to him, still less that before their consignment they may have already deteriorated, even in the country of their production.

This conception of the joke as in itself an imperishable creation, a permanent addition to the world's wealth, and fit companion of the serious work of Thucydides, as a 'possession for ever,' is really very humorous, when you come to reflect upon it. It is almost as humorous, indeed, as Mr. Labouchere's theory of poetry, which he regards, as he would coal or iron, solely from the point of view of the realised product, and not at all from that of the productive energy, arguing therefrom that since the

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

world has accumulated enough of the former the latter should now cease. ‘We have,’ he once wrote in comment upon some remarks of mine, ‘already enough of the article’—that is poetry—‘which has come down to us from former generations, and time has taken care that only what is good and sound has reached us. Why, then, should we trouble to read any more?’ And, therefore, why trouble to write, or, at any rate, to print, any more? ‘Poetry,’ in fact, means ‘poems’ to Mr. Labouchere in precisely the same way and to the same extent as ‘coal-mining’ means ‘coal.’ You examine your stocks of both commodities, find you have enough, and cease demanding; whereupon down go profits and up come strikes in one of the two businesses, though not, curiously enough, in the other. In the same way it is quite clear that to a great many worthy people ‘humour’ means the contents of a jest-book. If there are many jest-books in existence, in your own and other languages, then you are well supplied with humour, and, as far as you are concerned, there is no reason why the ‘humourist’ should go on producing any more. It is true that there is more of a prejudice against jocularity ‘which has come down to us from former generations’ than there is against poetry of a similarly imposing length of descent, and that the ‘good and sound’ joke does not in all circles enjoy the respect that is paid to seasoned and

well-preserved verse. Still, there is a considerable class of consumers who are quite satisfied with it even in its original state, and, unlike the poem, it is capable of being, and constantly is, 'worked up' again into new and attractive forms.

We need not, however, trouble ourselves about those excellent and most fortunate persons to whom the old, in all kinds, even in the humorous, is preferable to the new. Long may they live and flourish, and when they die, may the lapidary have the brilliant inspiration of inscribing 'Affliction sore,' or 'To live in hearts we leave behind,' on their tombstones, while Joe Miller acts as their Virgil through the Elysian Fields. Byron, I think it is, who in a note to one of his poems describes a certain country gentleman as one who 'would have the same joint for dinner every Sunday in order that he might make the same joke upon it.' Which of us with a sense of humour would be able, if he were a weekly guest of the squire, to help sharing in this amusement, tickled not, perhaps, by the jest, but at any rate by the laughter? And who will deny that the simple souls who have but one joke, and never tire of it, do themselves contribute in no small measure to the not unkindly mirth of the world?

It is with that more sophisticated and fastidious person who craves for novelty in his funniments that I am just now concerned. For it is a serious matter,

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

when you come to think of it, that humour should 'wear out.' Relative as our perceptions may be, they manage in other provinces of thought and feeling to keep up a respectable appearance of the absolute and the universal, of the unchangeable from age to age, and the indistinguishable as between nation and nation. The sublime, the terrible, the tender, the pathetic—there *does* seem to be some common international standard of these qualities; it *is* possible (continues our 'self-torturing sophist') to say, with a rough approximation to truth, that those written words which move a reader of one civilised nationality to awe or pity, which stir him to delight in the imaginative contemplation of Nature, or agitate him by the vivid portrayal of human passion, will, as a rule, produce the same effect in kind upon all readers of the same average level of intelligence, to whatever race they may belong. Of course (he admits) the effect may differ widely in degree. Dutch sublimity may only moderately impress me, and Norwegian pathos may leave me comparatively cold. Yet still I recognise the fact that both the pathos and the sublimity appeal, in their several degrees, successfully to the same emotions as are swayed by Shakespeare and Milton. But with what truth can I say of some of the jests which tickled the reader of Hierocles, or of thousands of others which have no doubt shaken millions of midriffs since that

Greek Joe Miller's day, that they appeal even faintly to those emotions which are swayed by Swift and Sterne, by Fielding and Dickens? So far from doing this, they 'reverse the engine,' so to speak; they set the emotional machinery working in precisely the opposite direction.

It is not a mere effect of time, either; or, at least, it cannot be that alone. For age does not wither nor custom stale the beauties of serious literature. People have not yet begun to think that the prayer of Priam to Achilles is poor stuff; or that Lucretius' description of the gods and their abode is fustian; or that Dante has spoilt the story of Paolo and Francesca. The judicious critic does not propose to obelise all the lines from 'The cloud-capped towers' down to 'is rounded with a sleep' inclusive; though the manager about to produce *The Tempest* might very likely pronounce them 'cackle,' and mark them with the blue pencil as 'to be omitted in representation.' We still read *Lycidas* with pleasure, and would hardly consent to strike out even the 'No Popery' part about the 'wolf with privy paw.' Even on lower literary levels good things of the serious description contrive to last. We still find Swift's account of the Struldbrugs passably impressive, and we do not set down Horne Tooke as a mere watery-headed 'cry-baby,' because the stern pathos of the closing paragraph of his enemy Johnson's Preface to the Dictionary affected

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

him to tears. It is humour alone which will not wear: it happens only to the joke to seem exquisite to the men of one age, and imbecile to the men of another; and this difference (concludes our despairing sceptic) must be due to something essentially perishable, something fundamentally relative, limited, occasional, about humour and its products. Who can know, then, what is its 'true inwardness,' how and in what form it can be assured of survival, or whether it is destined to survive in any form at all?

These, no doubt, are melancholy—even desolating—thoughts and questions; but I am not sure that the evocation of them will be without its salutary effects. The alarmist will get over his apprehensions as to the disappearance of humour when he has attained to a more accurate conception of what that peculiar faculty is; and in working his way to this he will find abundant consolation for the gradual decay of its successive products, and even for the circumstance that they are not in all cases suitable subjects of international exchange.

It would be hardly safe, perhaps, to affirm with absolute confidence that any one human energy is, as such, indestructible, still less that no such energy is transformable out of recognition in the course of the World-Process. It is possible to maintain, as a pessimistic thesis, that even the poetic instinct and

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

faculty will in course of time disappear; that its period of greatest strength is coincident with comparatively early stages of human development, and that, like the measles and other maladies which take such masterful hold of primitive races, its power is progressively declining with the advance of civilisation. At present, however, there are no signs of this; indeed, such signs as there are altogether 'contra-indicate' it, as doctors say; and on present appearances one would be disposed to hold that, whether our supply of the poetic product (warranted 'good and sound') be sufficient or not, or whether, if insufficient, the contemporary producer be capable or incapable of making any real addition to it, the work of poetic production is likely to continue, and to continue at an increasing rate.

So with humour. It is possible, as a pessimistic thesis, to maintain the probability of its effacement from the list of human energies; and it must be sorrowfully admitted, especially when we study certain results of the energising of the humorous faculty, that it seems to possess the less effective vitality of the two; but the contingency of its future disappearance seems practically as problematical and remote. Humour, like poetry, is the habit of contemplating, and of being affected by, the facts of consciousness in a particular way. It sees the mutual relations of thoughts, things, and persons—that is to

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

say, of thoughts to each other, of things and persons to each other, and of thoughts to things and persons —under an aspect, just as poetry does, of its own. Poetry unveils the hidden beauty, humour exposes the lurking incongruity, of these relations; and the charm of the humorous as of the poetic product varies directly as the sum of three ingredients—first, the objective truth and force of the revelation; secondly, its novelty and unexpectedness *as such* revelation; and thirdly, the subjective skill with which it is effected. In the greatest humorists, as in the greatest poets, all these three contributories touch their maximum. In their case the illuminant, humorous or poetic, is the most powerful and the most commandingly directed, and the illuminated object the most delightfully surprising in its new aspect. It is their chiefest triumph to transfigure with beauty and renew with humour those common things on which the careless eye of the world has rested, unsuspecting of their secret charm, a thousand times.

But all this is only true of the greatest in either kind; and where the poet or the humorist is something less than supreme he rarely has that magical gift of handling the ‘eternally common’ which will assure his work of sharing the perpetuity of its material. People see this clearly enough in the case of poetry, and are apparently resigned to it. At any

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

rate, they do not seem to distress themselves—I am not now speaking of Mr. Labouchere alone—at the reflection that the heritage of ‘good and sound poetry’ which has come down to us from former generations is small indeed compared to the total amount of the poetry which was regarded—and surely some of it justly—as ‘good and sound’ at the time of its production. In other words, they acquiesce philosophically enough in the fact that poetry—that is, some poetry—can grow old and perish, while they seem to be dismayed at the thought that humour—that is, some humour—is of the fashion that passeth away.

Of course, the actual discovery that it *is* of this fashion—at any rate when that discovery is made in the work of some dearly-loved humorist of one’s youth—is indefinitely the more painful of the two. That is for the reason already referred to: namely, that humour which fails to give its intended pleasure gives positive pain—a pain which is not in the smallest degree mitigated by the literary skill with which the product is presented. Better a thousand times to be a poet of a mode outworn than a *rococo* humorist; for the former, though banished from the common household of man, may in virtue of his style possess an eternal refuge in the temple of letters. What human heart is moved in these days by the poetry of Pope, yet what lover of the art of literature

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

has it ceased, or will it ever cease, to delight? The rhetorical passion which leaves him cold does not offend him; the decay of its once prized 'poetic beauties' detracts no whit from his enjoyment of its grace, its elegance, its matchless skill; nay, perhaps their charm is heightened by that scent of faded flowers. But think of the difference for a devoted Dickensian who suddenly finds himself confronted with some well-known passage of the master's 'high jinks,' the delight of his admirer's early youth, but now all gone flat—its humours changed into mere mechanical clowning from which all the spirit has departed! The writing is as good as ever, the movement of the scene as brisk, the technical skill of the whole, in short, as admirable as ever. But do these qualities console the disenchanted worshipper? Can he even bear to linger over the page in the hope that they may yield him consolation? No, he turns the leaf, perhaps closes the book, with a curious emotion of shame; to examine the vainly-grinning jest more closely would seem a kind of impiety. He almost feels like one who has unwittingly 'uncovered the nakedness of his father.'

Yet he is wrong to close the book, though right enough to turn the leaf; for if he has the courage to face the loss of some of his early illusions, he will find much happy and refreshing confirmation of his early tastes. If the critic in him should be, as it is

in some of us, for good or evil, not so *very* many years younger than the man, he will never have been able to accept *all* the Dickensian humour with absolute unreserve. Nay, even the comparatively uncritical youth of five-and-thirty years ago—a far less precocious period than the present—could not away with the whole of it; so that as regards some of its more exuberant mirth-making there is no illusion to destroy. Much of the rest, however, and that very often of the broadest, is still vital; it only needs that the breadth of the caricature should have some broadly human vice or foible to sustain it. There was always genius in its very exaggeration, and that genius will be found in most cases to have kept it alive. It is only, after all, the too narrowly local, the too eccentrically individual element, which has perished.

No doubt it is a blow to find—if we do find—that the humours of *Pickwick* have largely staled, and that we can no longer laugh as erst we laughed at the cockneyisms of Sam Weller. Yet, at least, the noble and impossible Pecksniff is still left to us almost as fresh as ever, and the fun of Todgers's—that Pension Vauquer of a more genial Balzac—groweth not old. Even Mrs. Gamp, now fallen unamusing as to her more than human perversions of articulate speech, is, beneath her lifeless *bizarrie* of externals, living still. We feel it when she sits down to tea with Mrs. Prig.

Her type has perished and passed away, but there is that in her—as there seems not to be in Sam Weller, a more purely stage construction—which holds of human nature and survives. The ‘sick and monthly’ of fifty years ago may have been folded up like a vesture and changed; but greed and cunning, vanity and unscrupulousness and gross animalism, and the semi-salacious interest of the lower order of womankind in the reproductive side of life—these are permanent human characteristics; and fused into one comic whole with the humour of unconsciousness it seems that they have power to delight us still.

Generally, therefore, we may venture, for the benefit of the too serious and desponding persons to whom I have referred, to hazard the proposition that Nature as exhibited in the human race, is not yet played out; nay, that in respect of her inexhaustible power of supplying art with perennially fresh material, she should be recognised as no less a ‘rum ’un’ by the present generation than by the age of Mr. Wackford Squeers. Only she cannot be expected to admit parentage of every artistic product, humorous or other, which one seeks to ‘mother’ upon her, and to shelter it as such for ever from the wasting hand of time. She will not do this even for a Dickens, as she has not done it even for a Sterne. She takes only from the hand of every romancer and every humorist, great or small, such children of his begetting

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

as are clearly stamped with her own image; such contrasts of character, such paradoxes of thought, such incongruities of association, as are drawn from her own bosom or ordered by her own hand; and the residue she relentlessly lets go. The loss of all that, from age to age, is certain, and may occasionally be painful; but it is not more certain than the preservation of what Nature has 'quoted and signed' as fit to be preserved. Hence let no one fear—as, perhaps, none do fear, save those defectively humorous persons who cling with such pathetic anxiety to the jest-book—that the written record of Humour is not as imperishable a part of man's spiritual possessions as the deposit of Poetry.

Whether it will be largely added to in the future is another question. That depends—it is less a truism than it seems to say so—on the persistence of the creative faculty as distinct from the appreciative sense of humour among civilised races. And there is not quite enough reassurance in saying that this faculty, having now become thoroughly 'organised' in the mental constitution of man, is not likely to disappear altogether. Perhaps not; but one cannot escape a fear that it may by degrees become dormant, or fall, so to speak, 'into abeyance'—like a peerage on failure of male heirs. One cannot help observing that the exercise even of the appreciative sense of humour appears to require a certain elasticity of the emotions,

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

which, to put it mildly, does not seem to be becoming a more common quality than it was. The young man whom one pronounces to be destitute of a sense of humour is not always intellectually incapable of perceiving the incongruous in human life ; or even the incongruous in his own person, position, and conduct. But the perception is a strictly intellectual one : it gives him no pleasure, but rather pain ; the last thing we should expect of it is that it should provoke him to a laugh.

It is contended, I am aware, in some highly optimistic quarters that this proves nothing. We have become less demonstrative than our fathers, that is all ; and we do not enjoy our humour any less than they did because we do not give such noisy expression to our amusement. I confess to regarding this as a very dangerous doctrine. True as it undoubtedly is that some of the most exquisite humour in the world is the most silently enjoyed, I have never myself met a thorough appreciator of this form of humour who was proof against that importunate demand which some sudden flashes of the humorous make upon one for an audible response. The power of laughter, and of hearty laughter—so far, at least, as my own experience goes—almost always accompanies a keen *emotional* sense of humour. As to the mere intellectual appreciation of it I say nothing ; that power, which is, no doubt, possessed in a high degree by the

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

Devil, is of little value to mankind. But I should doubt myself whether this emotional sense of humour—this capacity not only for perceiving the incongruous, but for *taking pleasure* in the sight—is ever accompanied by an inability to laugh. Among that very low-typed Oriental race, the Veddahs of Ceylon, this inability is said to be absolute; but my own inference from that, which I give for what it is worth, is that the Veddahs of Ceylon do not understand a joke.

I am not aware, however, that the point has ever been definitely settled, and since, in view of the growing seriousness of our young men, it is beginning to assume scientific importance, I suggest that steps should be taken to determine it once for all. A committee of ethnologists charged with the duty of investigating the matter might be despatched to Ceylon, where the Bishop of Colombo, himself a genuine humorist, and part author, in his pre-episcopal days, of one of the happiest academic skits ever written, would, I am sure, be glad to render them any assistance in his power. Translations of a few of the most approved works of our latest humorists might be presented to this interesting people for perusal, and the result observed and recorded. If it proved that although incapable of laughing at these pleasantries they had an intellectual appreciation of them—that is to say, that they could point out, if

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

only geographically, as it were, the exact spot on the printed page at which the laughter they are themselves incapable of supplying is intended to 'come in'—well, in that case their state would not be much less gracious than that of many old-fashioned people among ourselves. At any rate, the result of the experiment would be full of hope for the future of a country so many of whose most intellectual young men are in the habit of taking themselves almost as seriously as the Veddahs of Ceylon.

Meanwhile, and in the painful uncertainty of the present outlook, it is not surprising that the psychologist should come to the assistance of his fellow-citizens, and endeavour by analytic investigation of this apparently disappearing quality and by discovery of its true inwardness, to enable us to save it from extinction. If, argues he, we could only find out exactly what humour is 'in its quiddity,' we could keep ourselves humorous, or at any rate bring up our children to be so. This is very good of the psychologist: it is like his kindness; and his attempt to console and encourage us by these inquiries is the more praiseworthy because, from the popular point of view, the task is so essentially a thankless one.

There are indeed few studies which are pursued by the philosopher under such severe discouragements from simple and subtle alike. He soon finds that those who take any serious interest in the in-

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

quiry are far too intent upon the establishment of their own theories to pay any attention to his; while as to the general public, they are precluded by an incurable levity from considering the matter with any seriousness at all. Indeed, they are apt to find something unspeakably ridiculous in the mere fact that, despite its subject, there is no more fun in it than there is in other psychological inquiries—that, in fact, the analyst of the Humorous is not, or not at that moment, and in that capacity, a humorist. This, of course, is a preposterous injustice. It is worse than requiring the man who drives fat oxen to be himself as fat; it is to insist that he should be equally good to eat. Nothing, for instance, could have been more amusing in their irrevelance than were many of the newspaper comments on Mr. W. S. Lilly's recent investigation of this subject. Some of these dashing commentators showed evident signs of disappointment at not finding the 'Theory of the Ludicrous' more amusing; others were excited to scornful mirth by its logical method and arrangement. One of them found that 'a philosopher analysing jokes is a bit of a joke himself;' and I have no doubt at all that many a reader chuckled assent to the proposition. Mr. Lilly enumerated twenty-one forms of the Ludicrous, beginning with Humour and ending with Practical Joking; and at this also the critic from whom I have quoted was hugely tickled. The

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

idea of a man gravely counting the number of different ways in which one can be made to laugh! It was too absurd! The philosopher who could do such a thing may possibly have attained to a certain cold intellectual comprehension of a joke; but he cannot have the true sympathetic appreciation of humour, or he would be unable to contemplate the incongruity of his own position with unmoved muscles.

All this is very disheartening to analysts of the ludicrous, and has prevented at least one of them from taking a hand at the game (though it is one which he enjoys greatly) for some years past. Another discouragement which the analyst feels acutely is that his speculations are in like case with those of Dr. Primrose: they are addressed to the learned world, but the learned world takes no notice of them whatever. Perhaps the individual analyst has no right to complain, for he never notices the analysis of anyone else, or not, at least, of anyone later than Sydney Smith. We all begin with Sydney Smith and his famous dissertation in the *Edinburgh Review* article on 'Irish Bulls,' though Mr. Lilly only does so in order to dismiss the Canon's definition of humour as a 'surprising proposition:' which no doubt it does seem to be when taken in connection with the infelicitous examples which Sydney gives. But for one who has endeavoured to pursue the analysis

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

further, and who believes himself to have worked out the much-debated distinction between Wit and Humour in a formula, to which the only possible objection is that it seems far too symmetrical to be sound—for such an one, I say, to find that his labours have passed absolutely unnoticed by a fellow-inquirer (and how much more certainly, therefore, by an incurious and unpsychological public), there is good excuse for feeling something of the disappointment of Mr. Walter Shandy, when, master though he was of one of the finest chains of reasoning in the world, he was unable, for the life of him, to get a single link of it into the head of his wife.

No attempt, however, will here be made to subject the public to the cranial operation which would evidently have been necessary in the case of Mrs. Shandy. The analytic process referred to shall not be repeated in these pages. It will be enough to borrow one of them for a concise statement of its results.

They are embodied in the following propositions :

1. Wit and Humour, which have sometimes been treated as different results or aspects of the same mental process, are in reality the respective products of two diametrically opposed operations of the mind.

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

2. Wit consists in the revelation of unsuspected similarity between two otherwise dissimilar objects of thought.
3. Humour consists in the display (though not necessarily the *revelation*) of incongruity between two otherwise associable objects of thought.
4. Revelation being essential to wit, though not to humour, it follows that the element of surprise is a uniform constituent of the effect produced by the former, though not of that produced by the latter.
5. All incongruity implies dissimilarity ; but not *e converso*, dissimilarity being recognised by a purely intellectual apprehension, while incongruity exists only between such dissimilars as cannot be united in thought without producing an *emotional* shock.
6. The 'passion of laughter' is excited by incongruity alone. Humour, therefore, in its various forms, is the sole excitant of laughter.
7. The response to wit, *as such*, is not laughter, but merely that more sedate form of pleasurable emotion which the sudden discovery of fitness brought about by human

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

ingenuity—as in a clever mechanical invention, or the ingenious solution of a problem—is accustomed to evoke.

8. The fact that laughter is a frequent accompaniment of the response to wit is due to the fact that the objects between which wit reveals similarity are often not only dissimilar, but incongruous also, and their union in thought produces the emotional shock which is the characteristic effect of humour.

Several more propositions in the nature of corollaries to the foregoing might easily—perhaps only too easily—be added; but I refrain. The first and the last three will quite suffice, I feel sure, to provoke the vehement opposition of all those rival theorists who do not prefer to treat them with an even more vehement neglect. Space does not permit me to support them with examples, but it will be easy for anyone who doubts their soundness, especially that of No. 8, to test it by examples. Everybody who has any intelligent appreciation of wit will at once admit that over and above the epigrams, repartees, and *bons mots*, which have excited his mirth as well as admiration, he has heard in conversation, or met with in reading, an immense number of brilliant phrases, felicitous illustrations, apt comparisons, and other indubitable and indisputable specimens of wit

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

which have afforded him keen intellectual pleasure, without, however, provoking in him the slightest inclination to laugh. If, then, he will compare these specimens with those which have the power of exciting laughter, he will find that in every instance of the latter kind the wit has brought two incongruous objects into mental association ; and has thus produced that emotional shock that results from collision between ideas which, like the sublime and the ignoble, the comic and the tragic, the poetic and the prosaic, are respectively contemplated in two different *moods* of mind. For it is in the sudden descent or ascent from one of these moods that the emotions get their shock, and by a simple physiological process, which Mr. Herbert Spencer's explanation will presently be quoted to elucidate, laughter ensues.

Perhaps, however, I have lingered long enough on a side of the subject in which only a very small minority are interested. The British public, with its resolute practicality, has never taken kindly to analysis. It is essentially a synthetic public. It 'drives at practice,' as Mr. Matthew Arnold used to say of somebody else ; and its secret sympathies have always been with Mr. Squeers, when, after instructing his pupils in the orthography—or rather heterography—of the word 'winder,' he sends him away to clean one. It is tolerably certain that if

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

one were to write quite a thick volume on the Analysis of the Humorous, with specimens of humour (constructed as per analysis) at the end, the public would turn to the last page first, just for all the world as if the treatise were a sensation novel. Ever driving at practice, our people would hasten to examine these concrete examples of the humorous with the view of ascertaining beforehand whether a study of its abstract principles would be likely to repay them by developing the faculty in question.

Nor is there any doubt that, in secret, they suspect the soundness of any psychological reasoning on this subject which the psychologist is unable to prove by practice. The analyst, it is plain to see, is often uneasily conscious of this; and sometimes he longs to work out synthetically the demonstration of his theories. But it is when synthesis succeeds to analysis that disappointment ensues. You may work out your Theory of the Ludicrous with triumphant thoroughness; but when you pass from theory to practice, when you attempt to reintegrate your resolved ingredients and turn out a properly compounded joke, then it is that you find yourself face to face with the real difficulty. You get your two 'incongruous objects,' you excogitate your 'concept,' 'subsume' the former under the latter; and you let off your little joke. And lo ! nobody laughs. Everything has been done according to rule. If you

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

doubt it, you look up your Schopenhauer and satisfy yourself. Perhaps you re-read the famous passage justly praised by Mr. Lilly from Isaac Barrow, or you take a turn at your Sydney Smith. According to all these authorities you have been humorous ; you have scrupulously followed the instructions of the learned, and you are rewarded with the quiet conscience of the painstaking though unsuccessful artist. But the fact remains that you have failed to evoke that response from your audience without which even the most self-sufficient and stoical of jesters is rarely content. You have not made anybody laugh.

It may be that, as the world grows older, sadder, more fastidious, its humorists may learn to be content with the reward of their own consciences, and will cease to expect anybody to laugh. Perhaps, having themselves grown more philosophical, they will argue that the intrinsic merit of a joke, or even its projected power of amusing, can have little or nothing to do with anything so purely physical as that meaningless agitation of the abdominal and other muscles which we describe as laughter. True, it is a muscular convulsion of very ancient origin, and interesting to the biologist on that account. But so also are the primitive and rudimentary forms of humour : there is, indeed, a stage in human civilisation at which humour is as simple and as practical as laughter itself.

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

Let us, for instance, endeavour to conjure up to our imagination that scene of artless jollity—the old-fashioned country fair. Behold that circle of chubby bumpkins, each with his blowsy, apple-cheeked sweetheart at his side, and note that leathern ellipsoidal ring raised some five feet from the ground and fixed in that position, midmost the village green. As Victor Hugo would ask and answer in similar circumstances :

‘ What is it ? It is a horse-collar.’

All eyes are bent eagerly on the empty frame, and all await with tense expectancy the ‘ living picture ’ who is about to fill it. Many others have filled it already with more or less credit, but it is in the prowess of Giles Joskin that the knowing ones believe. See ! Giles is here. Lightly, confidently, he steps up to the collar, and in another moment there appears through its aperture, framed but ill-confined within it, the ‘ too vast orb ’ of his face. There is a moment’s pause, during which the spectators critically survey the champion’s countenance, red and round as a foggy sun ; and then, in a moment, the ruddy disc is suddenly cloven in twain by a horizontal fissure, which lengthening laterally and broadening vertically, like the chasm which swallowed the three rebels against Moses and Aaron, touches at last the sides of its environment, and bisects, at its

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

short axis, the leatheren ellipse. It is Giles Joskin's smile: a smile which all who see it recognise as victorious; and as the judge approaches with the prize of victory in his hand, and announces that Giles has carried off the flitch of bacon, to be awarded to him who should grin most effectively through the horse-collar, the welkin rings with rustic guffaws.

What has happened? Psychologically and physiologically, what has happened? There is no real doubt on either point; both have been well ascertained. Explained in terms of the emotions, the laughter of the tickled yokels is the expression of the 'sudden glory' of Hobbes—that glory 'arising from the sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves as compared with the infirmities of others.' Giles Joskin's grin—nay, his mere willingness to grin for the entertainment of the village—is the 'infirmity' which excites their sudden glory. For a flitch of bacon and the barren honour of exhibiting the biggest mouth in the country-side he has publicly made an ass of himself, while we (glorious thought!) we, his neighbours, are sitting here, eminent, superior, not grinning through horse-collars ourselves, but laughing at the ugliness and despising the shamelessness of those who do.

Explained in terms of the nervo-muscular functions, the case is equally clear. 'A large amount of

nervous energy,' says Mr. Herbert Spencer, 'instead of being allowed to expend itself in producing an equivalent amount of the new thoughts and emotions which were nascent' (with reference namely to Giles Joskin's chances of success) 'is suddenly checked in its flow' (that is to say, by the apparition of Giles's grin, and the instantaneous conviction that such an incomparable *rictus* must inevitably carry off the prize). 'The excess must discharge itself in some other direction, and there results an efflux through the motor nerves to various classes of the muscles, producing the half-convulsive actions we term laughter.'

No doubt this explanation is physiologically complete. Audrey giggling behind her beefy hand; her hee-hawing swain with palms pressed upon his Sunday waistcoat; the aged hedger who has broken his 'churchwarden' between his toothless gums in the convulsions of his mirth, are all simply working off an excess of nervous energy through the muscles of the jaws, thorax, and abdomen. So far all is plain sailing. Where the difficulty arises, that difficulty which so besets us in the field of practice, is in this: that a philosopher, looking on at this primitive competition, would not feel that he had any 'excess of nervous energy' to discharge. No resulting efflux pours along his motor nerves in the direction of his malar,

thoracic, and abdominal muscles; but, on the contrary, there is, if anything, a stimulus given to those portions of the muscular apparatus whereby we manifest a gentle depression of the spirits. And it then begins to dawn upon the philosopher that the analysis of humour can never be of much value as a basis for synthetical operations, having regard to the essentially subjective character of the ridiculous, and to the fact at that moment so importunately thrust upon him that what at one stage of the human intelligence may be found most potently laughter-moving, will at a higher stage prove absolutely incapable of exciting to merriment.

To console himself under these reflections, it is necessary that the philosopher should have in him what all philosophers have not, a dash of the humorist also. If he has, he will find that the scene is not wanting in food for genial mirth. To take but the most obvious of its suggestions, he may treat himself to an ample draught of that 'sudden glory' whereof we have been speaking. The yokels around him are laughing at Giles Joskin, but he will be laughing at the laughter of the yokels. While they are revelling in 'the sudden conception of their own eminency as compared with the infirmity' of a man who can grin in public through a horse-collar, he will be moved to mirth by the comparison of his own emin-

ency with the infirmity of men whom a man grinning in public through a horse-collar can amuse. But if he is a humorist of the truer and deeper sort, the scene of childish merriment will yield him more, much more, than this. The narrow, unsympathetic, contemptuous feeling of amusement, which is all that Hobbes took account of in his partially correct but wholly inadequate analysis of the 'passion of laughter,' will be of the shortest possible duration. A moment later, and he will think of the infinite intellectual interval, the innumerable gradations of refinement by which these clownish antics are divided from the satire of Swift or the irony of Voltaire, and the self-centred glory of superiority will give instant place to that strange, delightful, all-embracing sense of expansion and exaltation which suffuses our whole being when humour suddenly widens for us the horizons of the world.

And yet the broad buffooneries of the bumpkin and the subtlest strokes of the satirist are in their nature essentially one. The grin through the horse-collar is humour in the germ, and it has the pathetic interest of all rude beginnings. No doubt it is even further removed from the subtlety and finesse of the latest literary forms of humour than were the waggon and wine-lees of Thespis from the splendid equipment of the modern stage. But that is only

because its beginnings were immeasurably earlier in the history of human development than the birth of the drama. It may be that man began in the Stone Age to find amusement in any chance eminency over the infirmities of his fellows; to see another cut himself accidentally with a flint knife may have been the one great joke of the Palæolithic period. For, saddening as it may be to the sentimentalist to admit, the sense of humour must undoubtedly have had not a sympathetic but an anti-pathetic origin. We may take it as certain that the 'passion of laughter' in a Cave man was wholly and solely due to a sudden glory of superiority over some other Cave man; exultation in the fact that he was crippled or deformed, or for some reason or other *weaker* than the laugher, and therefore, should circumstances require it, his easy prey. Naturally it would take a good many æons to transform this attitude by a process of gradual modification to that (say) which is adopted by Sterne or an appreciative reader of Sterne towards the weaknesses of *My Uncle Toby*.

Very little progress had been made at any rate until after the heroic age of Greek poetry. The Homeric sense of humour, for instance, when you come to consider it, is quite in the stage of the country fair. Vulcan goes halting round the Olympian circle, cup in hand, in the absence of Ganymede,

and the lively gods break forth into peals of merriment. Did ever anyone see the like? This limping, ill-favoured blacksmith, grimy from his forge, to volunteer for the part of 'understudy' to the beautiful Idaean youth! What an exquisite joke! And so the 'inextinguishable laughter' of the immortals rolls on. How *naïf* again is the mirth of the Achæan chiefs when Ulysses canes Thersites on the hump with his baton for scurrility of language, and Thersites blubbers! It is evident, too, that Homer (or the Homeric Company) found matter of amusement in the personal aspect of the ill-conditioned railer. The poet dwells with relish on his squint, his hunched back, his strangely shaped and decorated skull—

Φοξὸς εἶν κεφαλὴν, ψεδνὴ δ' ἐπενήνοθε λάχνη—

'He had a sugar-loaf head with a thin stubble of hair sprouting from its apex.' There is quite a modern gust about this description; it almost anticipates the comic brutality with which human ugliness is treated by Smollett and humorists of his school. As a rule, too, one may say that physical infirmities and deformities were a good joke to the Roman of the classical era. Even Horace, an essentially good-natured little man, can snigger horribly over the *luridi dentes* and *capitis nives* of the superannuated Lyce, and indeed he congratulates the young men of

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

Rome generally on the excellent sport they must find in the contemplation of her ruined charms. The gods, he says, have prolonged her life to a raven's length of days, that our ardent youth might have the fun of seeing (*possent visere multo non sine risu*) the torch by which they once were kindled now smouldering in ashes. An 'Arry of the worst modern type would be incapable of jumping figuratively upon the most unworthy of 'Arriets in such a fashion as this.

We may say indeed that *not* to find food for mirth in the lowering misfortunes or disabling physical defects of others was distinctly exceptional with the ancients. It is with quite a shock of agreeable surprise that we find Persius speaking with contempt of a man who could taunt another on the loss of an eye —*lusco qui possit dicere, Lusce*. We are astonished at the magnanimity which could afford to neglect such an opening for pungent epigram, and feel that the poet must have been vastly in advance of his age. But in that idea of course there is a considerable mixture of egotistical self-deception. If we are to speak of mankind in the mass, and not of a certain small and highly-subtilized section of the human race, it would be perhaps wiser for us not to give ourselves too many airs over the country bumpkins gazing hilarious on the voluntary self-humiliation of

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

their clowning comrade. It is more than doubtful whether, for the great mass of humanity, the humorous has ever yet purged itself of this element of Aristotelian *ἐπιχαιρεκακία*, or ‘joy at one’s neighbours’ ills;’ whether, in other words, the multitude are even yet capable of being much amused except at the expense of their fellow-man. I do not see, indeed, how anyone can fail to appreciate the secular persistence of this element in the most popular forms of appeal to the sense of humour who merely considers the part played in fiction and drama, for many ages, by the deceived husband. From Boccaccio to Molière and Congreve, and from the comedians of the seventeenth century to the *farceurs* of the late nineteenth, the assumption that the unconscious dupe of the wife and the lover is essentially a ridiculous figure has immovably held its ground. That the person and situation have also been treated tragically is true but immaterial; it does not affect the significance of the fact that they *can* be, and for centuries have been, treated as a legitimate subject for comedy often of the most extravagant kind. Nor is it to the point that there has of late years been a much more prevalent inclination on the part of dramatists to treat the subject seriously. That unfortunately may only be a proof, not so much that our jokes have become more humane, as that a certain prominent, though not

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

numerous, section of us are getting too solemn to joke at all.

It is with the view, therefore, of warning the analytical humorist that the above retrospective sketch—cursory and imperfect as it is—of the history of humour has been attempted. The object of it is to remind him that, however skilled he may be in the subsumption of objects under concepts, people will only laugh at what amuses them; and that the question as to what does amuse them, has received, in different ages and among different peoples, a great variety of answers. Shakespeare, who, without being a professed and systematic analyst, stumbled occasionally upon analytic *aperçus* of no inconsiderable value, has made an often-quoted remark about the 'fortunes of a jest' lying in the ear that hears, rather than on the tongue that utters it; and this is a golden saying for all investigators of the psychology of humour. Our earnest pursuit of culture in these latter days has tended somewhat to obscure this truth. The humorous has been treated in too objective a spirit. It has been too easily assumed that it is a subject to be 'got up' like another; and it has been tackled with all the conscientious solemnity of the University Extension student. The result, of course, has been disappointing. It has been found that the 'personal equation,' even the 'international

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

equation,' if I may say so, counts for a good deal more than the conscientiously solemn student had supposed.

The 'international equation.' Yes, the expression though strange is correct, and has been advisedly used. It recalls me to that part of my subject to which I briefly referred at the outset of these remarks—I mean the resolute, nay, the desperate attempt which has been made of late years to 'internationalise' jokes. It seems to have occurred to some earnest caterer for earnest students that for the benefit of those who propose to 'take up' humour, it would be an excellent and highly 'educational' thing to start a *Humour of the Nations* Series, if that is its name, and the idea has been carried out with a grim and smileless perseverance which has in itself a richly humorous effect. The editor and contributors of these mournful hand-books have apparently kept their countenances ; perhaps they do not see the 'joke within the joke' ; there could be no more delightful joke than that they should not. But to the philosopher who is also a humorist, the reception of the whole series, or at least of the volumes of it which have appeared so far, has been vastly diverting. The very first to appear was a staggerer, at any rate, to those who had not previously made the acquaintance at school of the *Scholasticus* of Hierocles. This, then, was the

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

humour of Ancient Greece. How was it to be received? Was it possible to receive it with any warmer or more hilarious emotion than that of the reverence due to its venerable old age? Earnest students were discovered in odd corners with this perplexing Attic salt-cellar in their hands. Aristophanes, they had heard, was a great humorist, and by studying him in translation they had been able, if not to provoke themselves to laughter, at least to find the spot at which at the Dionysia the laughter was supposed to come in. But where, O! where, was its point of entrance in the pages of this Athenian Joe Miller?

The *Humour of Ancient Greece* was followed, I believe, by that of Ancient Rome, and this again by the *Humour of Holland*. We are, or were, promised some time ago the *Humour of Scotland*, and the *Humour of Japan*; but I have never seen them, and I do not know whether they are or are not of high educational value. But the general effect of the series was very disturbing to the popular mind. It shook the public faith in the possibility of a Science of the Humorous; it spread far and wide a desolating sense of the relativity of all human jokes. For a time, too, it paralyzed the energies of the psychologist, who, in the very act of 'subsuming incongruous ideas under concepts which only apply to them from

one point of view,' was overtaken by a sort of agnostic despair. Why bother one's head with concepts? he asked himself. Why continue to subsume when the only result will be to produce a formula which, even if it applies, as is more than doubtful, to jokes that amuse the people of the Netherlands, may utterly fail as an analysis of such pleasantries as are acceptable to the Japanese? Mr. Lilly has been the first to recover from this temporary depression, and to philosophise calmly and even hopefully on this attractive subject once more. Perhaps he has not come across the *Humour of the Nations* Series, if that be its name.

Nothing, however, is to be gained by shutting our eyes to the disquieting outlook before us. So far from its being possible to 'internationalise' humour, we may think ourselves lucky if we can manage to preserve even a national type. The Dickensian humour, it would seem, is 'off'; the American droll, after a vogue of a good many years, is apparently ceasing to amuse; the 'inverted aphorism' had but a short popularity, and ultimately perished in calamitous and indeed unmentionable circumstances; and nothing seems growing up to take its place. The new generation 'knocking at the door' rat-tats with quite portentous gravity. This is, no doubt, an improvement on the older generations, who thought it a first-rate stroke of wit to wrench off the knocker;

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

but their successors are surely carrying a virtue to excess. It seems a pity that they should be unable to laugh; but the most respected and 'intellectual' among them cannot. It was the way of certain frivolous old fogies a few years ago to twit them with their supposed taste for what was then called the New Humour, but there was really no foundation for the taunt. The New Humour turned out to be simply the Old Buffoonery 'writ small,' and, whoever its patrons are or were, they are not to be found among the thoughtful young men who represent the generation with its hand on the door-knocker.

Altogether we seem to be within measurable distance of a time when nobody will be outwardly amused by the humour of anybody else; or when no one, at any rate, will be moved or movable to those mere muscular demonstrations of merriment which the ludicrous was wont to provoke. To 'shake the midriff,' I will not say of despair, but of mere indifference, will be a feat beyond the power of the most skilled and experienced jester to perform. He will think himself lucky if, by his most successful pleasantry, he shall succeed in illuminating the countenances of his younger hearers with a wintry smile. So far have we now got from the primitive simplicity of the horse-collar and its enshrined grin. It is not, of course, that jokes will be worse than they used to be. On the contrary, if there is anything in science,

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

they ought to be, scientifically speaking, better; for they will be the results of a synthesis based upon and starting from an analytic process, which will be brought ever nearer and nearer to perfection. That they fail to tickle will not be due to any want of the qualities necessary to titillatory power, but simply to loss of sensibility in the patient. The feathers are right enough; it is merely a chronic case of anæsthesia of the mental footsoles.

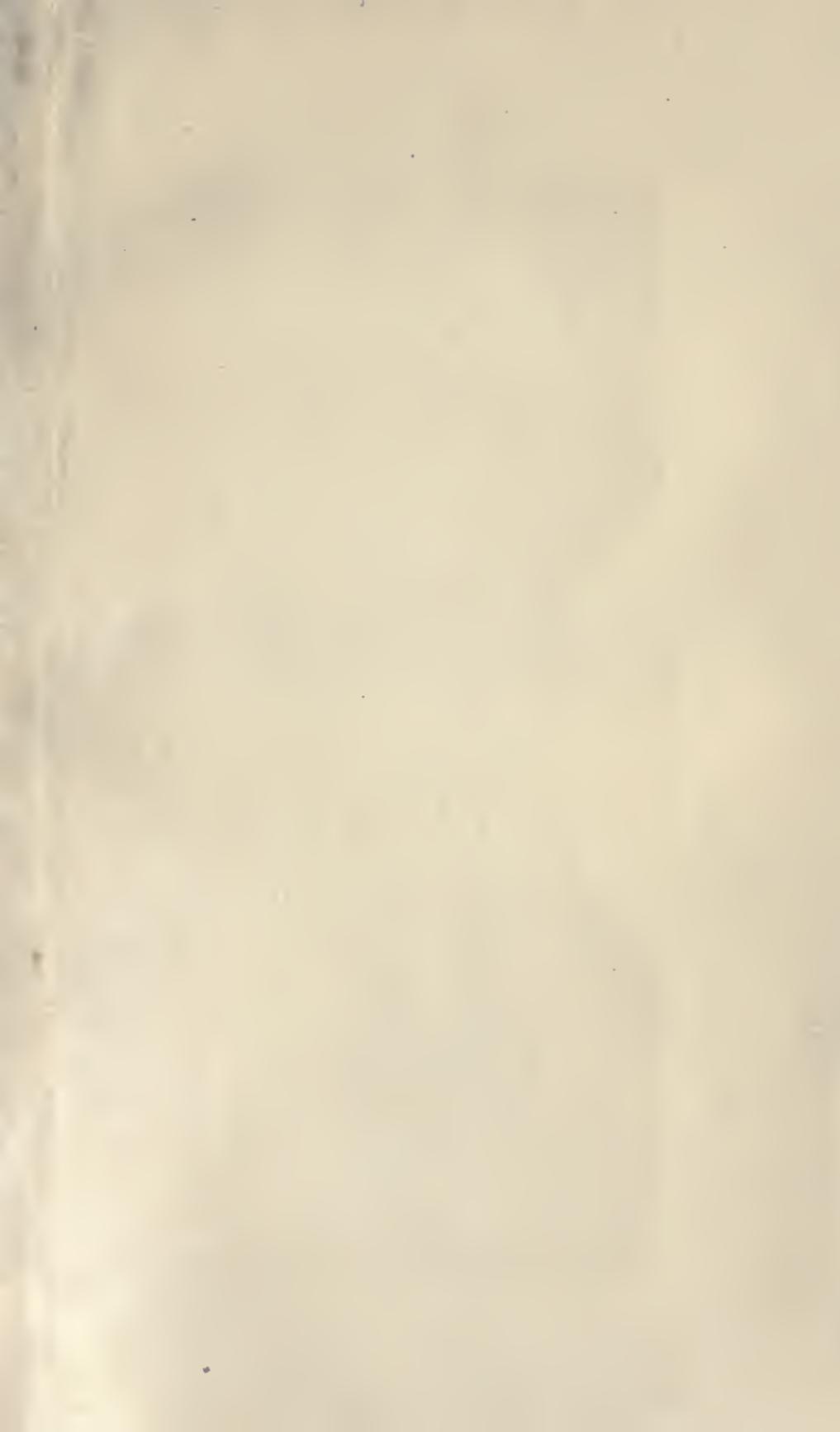
Of course, there will be consolations for the humorist; there are consolations already. The spectacle—and spectacles)—of the earnest young man gravely studying comic masterpieces, this and the *Humour of the Nations* Series (if that is its right name) are distinctly in the nature of consolations. And on the final arrival of the time when, although jokes still continue to be made as psychological experiments, nobody any longer laughs at the jokes of anybody else, or even at his own, there is no doubt that a situation of an intensely humorous character will be created for all those—by that time it is to be feared but a dwindling minority—who are capable of appreciating it. The sense of humour, especially in the elderly, tends in these days to become continually more and more self-centred and egoistic; they see life—especially youthful life—around them more and more completely converting itself into a comedy which they have all to themselves, at least

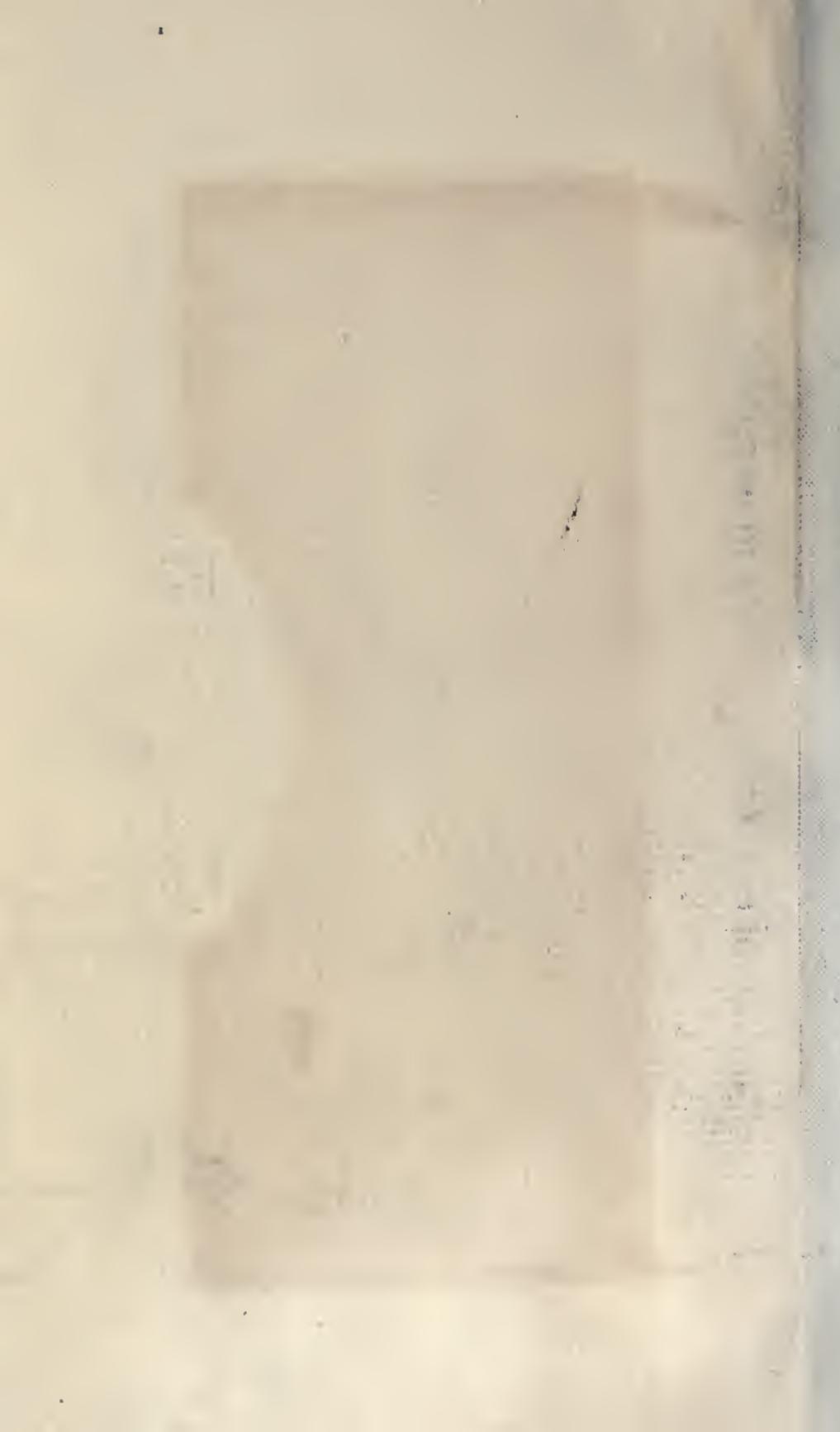
THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

if they may judge from the countenances of the actors; and it will be only a fitting termination to the process if one of them should find himself at last —like Campbell's *Last Man*, with a difference—alone in a world of humour of his own, enjoying the great Cosmic Joke in strict privacy amid many millions of earnest young men who do not see it, and deriving a subtle addition to his enjoyment from that very fact.

THE END.

NOTE.—The foregoing essays, which severally appeared for the first time in the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Contemporary Review*, the *National Review*, the *New Review*, and *Macmillan's Magazine*, have been carefully revised and in some cases virtually re-written for the purpose of inclusion in this volume. To the Proprietors of the above-mentioned Periodicals my thanks are due for permission to reprint.—H. D. T.





UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LIBRARY

Do not
remove
the card
from this
Pocket.

Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File."
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU

59687

Traill, Henry Duff
The New Fiction, etc.

L.E.H
T767n

